

LILY C. VUONG

Gender and Purity
in the Protevangelium
of James

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

358

Mohr Siebeck

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1 A 891993

ISBN 978-3-16-152337-3

ISSN 0340-9570 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed by Laupp & Göbel in Nehren on non-aging paper and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

This book is a revised version of my 2010 doctoral dissertation from McMaster University, under the supervision of Annette Yoshiko Reed. I first encountered the *Protevangelium of James* as an undergraduate student in a class devoted to early Christian literature. I read the text and thought it was a magically entertaining story about Mary's everlasting virginity, but then pondered little else about it. It was not until I was a graduate student under the tutelage of Professor Reed that my interest in apocryphal literature was rekindled. Questions concerning Jewish and Christian identity and self-definition, Jewish-Christian relations, and representations of women were my primary interests in the ancient world. Upon encountering the *Protevangelium of James* again, but with these newfound interests, the text appeared utterly fascinating and worth my full attention. This work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of Professor Annette Reed, whose unparalleled expertise in the field taught me how to ask the right questions and whose persistent help never let me lose my way and instead pushed me to become a better writer and thinker. She exemplifies what it means to be a scholar and has inspired me to strive for new levels of excellence in all my work. I am greatly privileged to have been mentored by her and continue to draw upon her example daily in my own scholarship and teaching.

I am also extremely thankful for the helpful suggestions and important critiques I received from those who read the manuscript during its various stages, especially Professors Anders Runesson, Eileen Schuller, who were members of my doctoral committee, and Professors Tobias Nicklas and Pierluigi Piovanelli who offer critical insights and feedback as I was preparing my manuscript for revision. A number of discussions have been vastly expanded and arguments significantly tightened as a result of their comments and careful attention to detail. I am responsible for any errors that still remain. Much of the writing of this book took place while I was a visiting scholar at Claremont Graduate University. I greatly benefitted from my involvement with the School of Religion, Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, and the program for Women's Studies in Religion and am most grateful to Professor Karen Torjesen for her encouragement, mentorship, and sound advice during my stay. I am also thankful to Kevin McGinnis at CGU for reading and

commenting on the work in its early stage and for being a sounding board to my various ideas and thoughts.

I must also mention Professors John Marshall, Stephen Shoemaker, and Andrew Jacobs for challenging my ideas and for their helpful feedback on various sections and arguments. Professors Ra'anan Boustan and Mary Foskett are also deserving of my thanks for their mentoring and encouragement of my work and career in the field. In addition, I appreciate my department colleagues and friends at VSU whose personal and professional support encouraged my research.

I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my sisters Amy, Lisa, and Stephanie, for their love and support. Many thanks especially to Dr. Eileen Jankowski who read too many drafts to count and listened much too patiently as I fussed over interpreting difficult ideas and texts – she deserves my utmost gratitude. I am grateful to Jörg Frey and Henning Ziebitzki for their interest in my work. To Nadine Schwemmreiter-Vetter and the staff at Mohr Siebeck for their corrections and helpful suggestions during the final production. And to Colin Law for his help on the index and other copy-editing issues, I offer much appreciation.

Finally, I thank my loving husband, James, who was there in the beginning and whose constant support, patience, and encouragement gave me the confidence to see this project through to the end. I could not imagine a better partner in life. Our daughter Olivia was born in the middle of my preparation of the book. I excitedly anticipate sharing these important texts with her and hope she enjoys them as much as I do.

Georgia, October 2013

Lily C. Vuong

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AC	<i>Ami di Clergé</i>
AELAC	Association pour l'étude de la Littérature Apocryphe Chrétienne
AJS	Review Association for Jewish Studies Review
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AnBoll	Analecta Bollandiana
AnCl	<i>L'antiquité classique</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
ANT	Apocrypha Novi Testamenti
Apocrypha	<i>Apocrypha</i>
B.	Babylonian Talmud
BAC	The Bible in Ancient Christianity
BAFCS	The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BMC Review	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CA	Christianismes Antiques
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCR	<i>Coptic Church Review</i>
CQS	Companion to the Qumran Scrolls
CCSA	Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EM	<i>Ephemerides Mariologicae</i>
Eranos	<i>Eranos Jahrbuch</i>
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GCS NF	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte (Neue Folge)
Gesta	<i>Gesta</i>
GP	Greek and Philosophy

List of Abbreviations

XIV

HAR	Hebrew Annual Review
HB	Hebrew Bible
HDB	Harvard Divinity Bulletin
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
Hugoye	Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JCSSS	Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JETS	Journal of Evangelical Theological Society
JFSR	Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	Journal of Religion
JRH	Journal of Religious History
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOT	Journal for the Study of Old Testament
JSP	Journal for the Study of Pseudepigraphy
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of Pseudepigraphy: Supplement Series
JSQ	Jewish Studies Quarterly
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KEK	Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar
KFA	Kommentar zu frühchristlichen Apologeten
Koroth	Koroth
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio Difficilior
LHR	Lectures on the History of Religions
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
M.	Mishnah
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
NA	Neutestamentliche Apokryphen
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
Neot	Neotestamentica
NIDB	New International Dictionary of the Bible
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NOMO	Der Nahe Osten und der Mittlere Osten
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTR	New Testament Readings
NTS	New Testament Studies

Numen	Numen: International Review for the History of Religions
ODCC	The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church
ONS	Origini Nuova Serie
PACE	Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement
PETSE	Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PHC	A People's History of Christianity
Prooftexts	Prooftexts
PS	Patriologia Syriaca
RB	Revue Biblique
REA	Revue des Études Anciennes
RESAA	RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics
RFCC	Religion in the First Christian Centuries
RevQ	Revue de Qumran
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLABib	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLCA	Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Addresses
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SCHT	Studies in Christian History and Thought
SCSCO	Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
SE	Studia Evangelica
SecCent	Second Century
Semeia	Semeia
SH	Subsidia Hagiographica
Signs	Signs
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
Spec	Speculum
SS	Studia Sinaitica
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
StBP	Studia Post-biblica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STTS	Semitic Texts and Translation Series
T.	Tosefta
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TS	Theological Studies
TSA	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
TSB	The Scholars Bible
TSK	Theologische Studien und Kritiken
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Altchristlichen Literatur

VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Introduction

Second only to her son Jesus, Mary easily stands as one of the most popular figures in Christian tradition. Despite the scant information provided about her in the Gospels of Matthew (Matt 1–2) and Luke (Luke 1–2),¹ Mary has been the subject of much scholarship, especially in relation to claims about her paradoxical status as ever-virgin and mother of the messiah. Likewise, a great number of studies have explored the history of Mary's characterization in Christian literature, art, and music from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.² Much less attention, however, has been

¹ See further, e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 25–26; idem, ed., *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Fortress, 1978); Bertrand Buby, *Mary of Galilee: Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Alba House, 1994); C.T. Davis, “The Fulfillment of Creation: A Study of Matthew’s Genealogy,” *JAAR* 41 (1973): 520–35; M.D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (SNTSMS 8; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); X. Léon-Dufour, *Etudes d’évangile* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), esp. chapter entitled “L’Annonce à Joseph,” 65–81; K. Stendahl, “Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt 1–2,” in *Judentum Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für J. Jeremias* (ed. W. Eltester; BZNW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 94–105; G. Graystone, *Virgin of all Virgins: The Interpretation of Luke 1:34* (Rome: Pio X, 1968); P.S. Minear, “Luke’s Use of the Birth Stories,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert* (ed. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn; Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 111–30; S. Lyonnet, “Le récit de l’annonciation et la maternité divine de la Sainte Vierge,” *AC* 66 (1956): 33–48.

² E.g., Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2–3; Hilda C. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (2 vols.; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963, 1965); Thomas Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London: Burns and Oates, 1893); Rudolph Yanney, “Saint Mary and Eve in the Church Fathers,” *CCR* 25.4 (2004): 116–17; Robert B. Eno, “Mary and her Role in Patristic Theology,” in *The One Mediator, the Saint, and Mary* (ed. H.G. Anderson; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 159–76. For an introduction to the Virgin in art see G. Schiller’s *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 1 (trans. J. Seligman; New York: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 13, 94–114; A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (Bollingen Art Series 35.10; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 13. Mary’s popularity in music and art is, arguably, unmatched by any other single figure in Western history. In art, the Vir-

given to narratives about Mary in the so-called “New Testament apocrypha.”³ Despite the influence of early “apocryphal” narratives on later literary and artistic representations of Mary, such texts have been relatively neglected until very recently. However, recent scholarship has seen a rise in the value of apocryphal literature for not only providing a more reliable picture of Mary, but also serving as an important window into the formative periods of early Christianity and its relationship to Judaism.⁴

Madonna and child is often portrayed holding the Christ Child; the earliest representation of the Madonna and child may be the second century painting in the Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome. Other important representations include Cimabue’s thirteenth century painting entitled *Maesta of Santa Trinita Madonna* in Florence, Giotto’s ca. 1310 painting, *Ognissanti* or *Enthroned Madonna* in Florence, and Duccio’s early fourteenth century painting entitled *Maesta*. Among the most popular of Marian art is the collection of mosaics found in the church in Chora in Istanbul, at which the entire narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* is visually presented. In medieval Europe, the development of the typology of Eve, the disobedient and sinful mother of Cain, and Mary, the obedient and chaste mother of Christ, was also enthusiastically explored not only in literature, but also within art. One of the most popular motifs, which became well known in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, is of Mary treading on the head of the serpent and reversing the sin of Eve. On the iconographic motif of Mary trampling the heads of snakes, dragons, and other like creatures, see Henry Kraus, “Eve and Mary: Conflicting Images of Medieval Women,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard; Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982), 79–100; Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Annette Y. Reed, “Blessing the Serpent and Treading on Its Head: Marian Typology in the S. Marco Creation Cupola,” *Gesta* 46.1 (2008): 41–58. With respect to Mary’s popularity in music, Giuseppe Verdi’s composition of *Ave Maria* in 1889 and *Stabat Mater* in 1897, Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Magnificat* in 1723, and Claudio Monteverdi’s *Vespro Della Beata Vergine* (Vespers of the Blessed Virgin) in 1610, are but a few examples of the vast array of music devoted to the Virgin.

³ For discussions of the use of the term “apocrypha” for a category of writings and the problems that it raises, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher ed., *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (London: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 9–15; E. Junod, “La littérature apocryphe chrétienne constitue-t-elle un objet d’études?,” *REA* 93 (1991): 397–414; idem, “Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament: Une appellation erronée et une collection artificielle,” *Apocrypha* 3 (1992): 17–46; P. Piovanelli, “Qu’est-ce qu’un ‘écrit apocryphe chrétien,’ et comment ça marche? Quelques suggestions pour une herméneutique apocryphe,” in Pierre Geoltrain ou comment “faire l’histoire” des religions: *Le chantier des “origines,” les méthodes du doute, et la conversation contemporaine entre disciplines* (ed. S.C. Mimouni and I. Ullern-Weitè; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 173–87.

⁴ E.g., Stephen Shoemaker, *The Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); idem “The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church according to the Earliest Life of the Virgin,” *HTR* 98.4 (2005): 441–67; see also idem, “Between Scripture and Tradition: The Marian Apocrypha of Early Christianity,” in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannen-*

In accordance with the view that “apocryphal” texts can offer much in the way of helping modern scholars piece together a more accurate understanding of the Jewish environment of early Christian thought in general, and a better understanding of Mary in particular, this study offers an analysis of the depiction of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*. The *Protevangelium of James* dates from the second or third century CE⁵ and is arguably the most ancient surviving source that exhibits profound and concentrated interest in the character of Mary for her own sake. She is, in fact, the text’s protagonist, and the narrative provides an extensive account of her life, including the events surrounding her conception and birth (*Prot. Jas.* 1–5).⁶ Although the *Protevangelium of James* is often cited as influential for later Christian reflection about Mary, gender, and virginity,⁷ it has rarely been studied for its own sake. Specialist studies of the *Protevangelium of James*, moreover, have tended to focus on its complex textual-history and/or on the debated questions of its theological function and date.⁸ What has been lacking, however, is a sustained analysis of its narrative and literary features, particularly as they contribute to its portrait of Mary.

giesser, 11–13 October 2006 (ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu; BAC 6; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 491–510 and Enrico Norelli’s important survey on Marian Apocrypha; *Marie des Apocryphes: Enquête sur la mère de Jésus dans le christianisme antique* (CA 1; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2009). Cornelia Horn’s studies on the reception history of the *Protevangelium of James* (“Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and in the Qur’ān,” *Apocrypha* 17 [2006]: 113–50) also examine the various aspects of Marian apocrypha.

⁵ See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of the debates about its date.

⁶ As noted below, all citations of the *Protevangelium of James*, unless otherwise indicated, reflect the chapter and verse divisions in Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 32–77.

⁷ E.g., Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273–74; Peilikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 74; Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 100–125; Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 141–64.

⁸ E.g., Oscar Cullmann, “The *Protevangelium of James*,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1, 421 on date, 423–24 on provenance; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11 on date, 12 on provenance; Émile de Strycker, “Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques,” in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 418; E. Cothenet, “Le Protévangile de Jacques: Origine, Genre et Signification d’un Premier Midrash Chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie,” *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1998), 4257 on date, 4267 on provenance; and Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 108.

Towards this goal, my study will investigate the *Protevangelium of James*' characterization of Mary by means of a focus on the theme of purity. A number of scholars have noticed the significance of this theme in the text.⁹ Peter Brown, for instance, observes that the "narrative already presented Mary as a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space."¹⁰ Likewise, Beverly R. Gaventa notes that the "story itself abounds with the language of purity," adopting the phrase "sacred purity" to describe the manner in which the *Protevangelium of James* portrays Mary.¹¹

Although many scholars have thus pointed to the text's special interest in Mary's purity, few inquiries into this theme have gone beyond the motif of virginity. Even less has been done to investigate how the theme of purity operates in the narrative as a whole. In this study I suggest that purity is a unifying theme throughout the *Protevangelium of James*, not limited simply to the events immediately surrounding Jesus' birth; rather, the idea of purity dominates the entire narrative and is central to its structure. The *Protevangelium of James* explores a variety of ideas concerning Mary's purity, from both ontological and situational perspectives. From the homemade sanctuary created for Mary by her mother Anna (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4–5) to the sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4–6), Mary's living spaces and arenas of social interaction are depicted as free from the common and unclean, and they are said to be maintained in this manner throughout her life. According to the *Protevangelium of James*, her status as a virgin also remains constant. In the text, Mary's virginity is questioned three times and is twice tested publicly (*Prot. Jas.* 15:9–13; 20:1–4), and she proves that she is a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5; 12–19; 20:1–4). The treatment of Mary's pre-and post-partum virginity in the *Protevangelium of James* greatly influenced later Christian tradition, and this element of the text has been widely noted in modern scholarship.¹² I will propose, however, that the assertion of Mary's virginity is just one aspect of the text's broader attempt to celebrate Mary by depicting her as pure.

⁹ See e.g., Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 16; Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 425; H.R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 174; Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 141–64; and discussion below.

¹⁰ Brown, *Body and Society*, 273.

¹¹ Gaventa, *Mary*, 109–10.

¹² See, e.g., Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 113–22, and the essays in Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins, eds., *The Feminist Companion to Mariology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005), especially John Dominic Crossan, "Virgin Mother or Bastard Child?," 37–55; Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sex, Birth, Purity and Asceticism in the *Protevangelium Jacobi*," 56–66; Foskett, "Virginity as Purity in the *Protevangelium of James*," 67–76; and George Themelis Zervos, "Christmas with Salome," 77–98.

At the same time, I focus on the place of purity in the *Protevangelium of James* in order to shed fresh perspective on debates about the date and provenance of the text, and on the discussion of its relationships to other Jewish and Christian traditions. To expound upon Mary's purity, the *Protevangelium of James* draws multiple motifs and models from traditions about women, childbirth, and the Temple in the LXX, on the one hand, and from descriptions of Mary in Gospel traditions (esp., Matthew, Luke, and/or an early harmony combining them), on the other. Attention to such intertextual connections may help illuminate the text's portrayal of Mary and its characterization of female purity and sexuality, as well as the cultural contexts and literary conventions that may have informed them. In addition, a focus on the theme of purity may open the way for investigating the *Protevangelium of James* in relation to the Judaism of its own time (i.e., second to third century CE). Just as Mary's connection to Judaism is explored in the text primarily by means of the theme of ritual purity and in relation to the Temple, so an analysis of the narrative depiction of this connection may shed new light on the aims and context of the *Protevangelium of James* itself. In particular, such an approach may allow for a fresh perspective on the text's relationship to early rabbinic Judaism and Syrian Christianity,¹³ which may in turn shed new light on long-standing debates about the narrative's date and provenance as well as its so-called "Jewish-Christians" character.

By exploring such connections, my goal is to contribute not only to research on the *Protevangelium of James*, early Jewish/Christian relations, and the history of biblical interpretation, but also to research on the development of Mariology and the range of early Jewish and Christian attitudes towards gender, the body, purity, family, and sexuality. I propose, in particular, that the theme of purity may be pivotal for the text's presentation of Mary as a paradigm for other (Christ-believing)¹⁴ women to follow. In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary seems to be depicted as exempt from all impurities except for one; the text, as we shall see, appears to imply that

¹³ I have chosen to use the term "Syria" and "Syrian" to cover a broad geographical and cultural area extending beyond the boundaries of the Roman province of Syria in accordance with Kevin Butcher who writes, "Syria is an ill-defined, impure geographical notion which accords well with the complex and ill-defined social and religious identities..." which I consider in this study. In doing so, references to Syriac Christianity specifically reference those sources or writings that were written in Syriac, all of which are a subset of Syrian Christianity. See Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 10 ff.

¹⁴ Particularly by virtue of the fluidity in the nature and range of biblically-based religious identities in the second and third centuries, it may be misleading to apply the term "Christian" to this text; see further discussion of the *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism in Chapter One and my note on terminology below.

she menstruates (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3–5). Even as the assertion of Mary's extreme purity functions to set her apart as unique, this allusion to her menstruation may function as a way to allow her reconnection with, and accessibility to, other women. The text's concern for menstrual impurity, moreover, may help to shed light on the cultural context in which the text took form – pointing, in particular, to a Syrian Christian context with some cultural proximity to Jewish groups for whom issues of women's ritual purity were significant.

A. Textual History and Witnesses

Despite its exclusion from the NT canon, the *Protevangelium of James* survives in a large number of manuscripts and versions. In his 1956 dissertation, for instance, Boyd Lee Daniels describes the *Protevangelium of James* as one of “the oldest and most influential writings... [that] was more popular than most of the apocrypha.”¹⁵ The text survives in multiple languages, including Greek, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Slavonic.¹⁶ In addition, Oscar Cullmann proposes that the *Protevangelium of James* may have been integrated into early liturgical collections.¹⁷ Even as the wealth of textual witnesses attests the popularity of the *Protevangelium of James* in pre-modern times, it also poses a challenge for current scholarly attempts at literary analysis. There is, as Hans-Josef Klauck notes, much textual variation and fluidity among the witnesses: “we find abbreviations, expansions and paraphrases, and even the oldest textual witness, PBodmer V, displays traces of considerable interventions.”¹⁸ Scholars generally accept that the *Protevangelium of James* was originally composed in Greek.¹⁹ C. Tischendorf's 1876 edition

¹⁵ Boyd Lee Daniels, “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the *Protevangelium of Iacobii*” (2 vols.; PhD Diss., Duke University, 1956), 32.

¹⁶ Cullmann, “*Protevangelium of James*,” 421–38. For a list of the most important manuscripts, versions, and translations, in both ancient and modern languages, see J.K. Elliott's *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 52–57. Note that Elliott's translation there is based on Tischendorf's reconstruction of the Greek text.

¹⁷ Cullmann, “*Protevangelium of James*,” 421–38.

¹⁸ Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. Brian McNeil; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2003), 65.

¹⁹ Notably, two German scholars writing independently of one another at the end of the nineteenth century challenged this view. Ludwig Conrady (“Das *Protevangelium Iacobii* in neuer Beleuchtung,” *TSK* 62 [1889]: 728–84) and Alfred Resch (*Das Kindheitse-Buchhandlung*, 1897) argued in favour of a Hebrew original instead. Resch went so far

as to claim that a Hebrew original was used, not only by the author of the *Protevangelium of James*, but also by NT gospel writers like Luke. This theory, however, has not gained much credence.

Before the discovery of this papyrus in 1952,²⁰ Tischendorf's critical edition of the text had been accepted as the standard edition.²¹ In 1958, M. Testuz first published the text of this newly-discovered papyrus in *Papyrus Bodmer V: Nativité de Marie*. In 1961, Émile de Strycker integrated the evidence of Bodmer Papyrus V into a new critical edition (*La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques. Recherches sur le Papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte et une traduction annotée*), in a provisional attempt to reconstruct the most ancient recoverable form of

to claim that a Hebrew original was used, not only by the author of the *Protevangelium of James*, but also by NT gospel writers like Luke. This theory, however, has not gained much credence.

²⁰ Daniels, “Greek Manuscript Tradition,” 4.

²¹ In his study of the Greek manuscripts of the *Protevangelium of James*, Daniels provides a systematic list of MSS by number and location; “Greek Manuscript Tradition,” 40–52. See also de Strycker, “Die Griechischen Handschriften des *Protevangelium Iacobi*,” in *Griechische Kodikologie und Textüberlieferung* (ed. D. Harlfinger; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 577–612. In this study, de Strycker investigates the Greek manuscript tradition and categorizes the various MSS into five families; on this see esp. 588–607.

²² M. Testuz dates the Bodmer Papyrus V to the third century CE, in contrast to Cullmann and Klauck, who date it to the fourth century. See Testuz, ed. and trans., *Papyrus Bodmer V: Nativité de Marie* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1958), 23–26; Cullmann, “*Protevangelium of James*,” 421–38; Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65. On the entire Bodmer Papyrus V and the relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* to the other writings found in this manuscript, see Tobias Nicklas and Tommy Wasserman, “Theologische Linien im Codex Bodmer Miscellani,” in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; TENTS 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006). On their discussion of the *Protevangelium of James*, see esp. 171–73.

²³ The Papyrus Bodmer V is one of the twenty-two papyri found at Pabau near Dushna, Egypt in 1952. Interestingly, these papyri vary in content ranging from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and early Christian literature to Homer's *Iliad* and Meander's comedies. All but two papyri are located at the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana in Cologny, Switzerland (near Geneva; P74 and P75 are at the Vatican Library). For an introduction to the Bodmer discovery, see Albert Pietersma, “Bodmer Papyri,” *ABD* 1:766–77; James M. Robinson, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri, the First Christian Monastic* (Nashville: Cascade, 1987, 2007).

²⁴ C. Tischendorf, ed., *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Avenarius and Mendelssohn, 1876), 1–50.

the text.²⁵ In 1995, Ronald F. Hock published a translation of the *Protevangelium of James*, based mainly on de Strycker's edition, albeit with some departures.²⁶ Most notably, Hock was able to make use of Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 3524, a sixth century Greek fragment discovered in 1896–7 that covers a portion of Chapter 25 of the *Protevangelium of James*.²⁷

The literary analysis in the present study is based on Hock's edition of the Greek. Hock essentially uses de Strycker's text based on the Bodmer Papyrus V,²⁸ which he admits is provisional, but still the standard edition. Rather than use Hock's English translation, however, I provide my own renderings from his edition with reference to others where relevant. Hock's translation is aimed at accessibility for a contemporary non-specialist audience. Although it is very readable, his translation is – as J.K. Elliott notes – “not always close to the Greek”; for example, “Biblicisms... [and] verbs of saying are sometimes avoided in the interest of raciness.”²⁹ For the purposes of this study, however, a more literal translation is apt, as literary analysis cannot be pursued apart from attention to the specific word choices in the Greek itself.

For this reason, I quote from the Greek and include English translations of the relevant passages. For both, I also consult Hock's extensive textual notes, particularly when he departs from de Strycker's determination of the earliest recoverable reading. In my citations of the *Protevangelium of James*, I follow Hock's system of splitting the text by chapter and verse,³⁰ rather than de Strycker's use of the page and line numbers of the Bodmer papyrus.³¹ Throughout this study, variants between major manuscript tradi-

tions will be noted only in cases where they affect the meaning of key passages pertaining to the theme of purity.

Next to the Greek original, the surviving fragments of the Syriac translation are among the oldest and most important witnesses to the text. The Syriac survives in four manuscripts, commonly referred to as *Syr^a*, *Syr^b*, *Syr^c*, and *Syr^d*.³² The earliest of these, *Syr^a*, dates to the fifth century.³³ The Syriac translation first came to the attention of scholars in 1865, when William Wright published a sixth century fragment from the British Museum (Add. 14484) that contains portions of the second half of the *Protevangelium of James* (i.e., ch. 17 to end).³⁴ Wright suggested that this Syriac fragment, now known as *Syr^b*, formed an important witness to the original Greek text.³⁵ The manuscript fragment British Museum Add. 14484 was reprinted by E. Wallis Budge in 1899.³⁶

In 1895, Agnes Smith Lewis purchased a collection of texts found on vellum palimpsest in Suez, which she would publish in 1902. On the surface of this particular manuscript lay a collection of writings on the works of Church Fathers (e.g., Athanasius, John Chrysostom) in Arabic script dating from the ninth or tenth century. Preserved underneath were sections from a Syriac version of the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Transitus Mariae*,³⁷ the latter treating the life of Mary with specific focus on the As-

²⁵ Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 422–23.

²⁶ De Strycker has argued that all four manuscripts (however fragmented) are from a single version, based on the fact that they all can be easily arranged in their proper sequence (*La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 353). In Agnes Smith Lewis' manuscript, *Syr^a* is used as the base, with *Syr^b* cited for its variants. P. Quecke has done the same work for *Syr^c* and *Syr^d*, respectively. See de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 35, 353–55, for specific details on each of the four Syriac manuscripts and n. 37 below on Smith Lewis' work.

²⁷ William Wright collected, edited, and translated Syriac manuscripts from the British Museum in *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865).

²⁸ Wright dated this Syriac fragment to the second half of the sixth century; see *Contributions to Apocryphal Literature*, 6 of preface. See pages 1–5 of the main text for his translation of this Syriac fragment.

²⁹ E. Wallis Budge, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the History of the Likeness of Christ* (London, 1899), reprinted as *History of the Blessed Virgin in English and Syriac* (STTS 4–5; New York: AMS, 1976).

³⁰ Smith Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca. The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae with Texts from the Septuagint, the Corân, the Peschitta, and from a Syriac Hymn in a Syro-Arabic Palimpsest of the Fifth and Other Centuries, and an Appendix of Palestinian Syriac Texts from the Taylor-Schechter Collection* (SS 11; London: C.J. Clay and Sons, Cambridge University Press, 1902), xviii. This collection of writings also includes portions of an Arabic text of the Qur'an, which can be dated between the late seventh and the middle of the eighth centuries.

²⁵ See the introduction of de Strycker's critical edition of the Greek *Protevangelium of James* in *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 13–63, and Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 421–22.

²⁶ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 28–30.

²⁷ A.K. Bowman, et al, trans. and eds., “Papyri Oxyrhynchus. 3524: Protevangelium of James 25:1,” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 50 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983), 8–12.

²⁸ For readings unique to the Bodmer Papyrus V, I have based my consideration on Testuz's edition and translation.

²⁹ E.g., “behold” is variously translated as “there it was,” “right then,” “suddenly,” “abruptly”; while “woe” at 20:3 is translated as “I'll be damned.” See Elliott's review in *NovT* 39.3 (2006): 299–300. Note that the English version in Schneemelcher's *New Testament Apocrypha* is an English translation of Cullmann's German translation (i.e., rather than a direct translation from Greek to English).

³⁰ Hock has retained Tischendorf's chapter divisions but the numbering system there is his own.

³¹ Hock's division of the text differs slightly from that used in Cullmann's translation published in Schneemelcher's *New Testament Apocrypha*.

sumption and Dormition.³⁸ This Syriac version of the *Protevangelium of James* was soon found to predate the fragment published by Wright; Smith Lewis dated it "possibly to the latter half of the fifth century; or at the latest to the beginning of the sixth."³⁹ In her translation of the manuscript, which is now known as Syr^a, Smith Lewis provides the variants of Syr^b in her footnotes. With respect to her translation, however, de Strycker noted already that "n'est pas toujours entièrement exacte."⁴⁰

The third Syriac manuscript, known as Syr^c, consists of two unconnected leafs published by Eduard Sachau in 1899.⁴¹ Though Sachau does not indicate the date, E. Nestle was able to provide more information on its content with notes on the Greek in a 1902 article.⁴² The fourth and last manuscript, now called Syr^d, is a Syriac fragment that is inserted in Budge's *Vie Syriaque de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie*⁴³ and contains sections from 43:8 to 49:1, according to de Strycker's numbering system.⁴⁴

Modern studies of the Syriac text have been limited, particularly in comparison to the attention given to the Greek text. Recently, however, Cornelia Horn has investigated its development and reception history.⁴⁵ Although Horn examines the transmission of the *Protevangelium of James* in order to illuminate other Marian apocrypha (e.g., *Lives of Mary/The Life of the Virgin*), her work confirms the significance of the Syriac version, both for our understanding of the earliest recoverable text of the *Protevangelium of James* and for our knowledge of its rich reception-history.

³⁸ See esp. Cornelia Horn, "From Model Virgin to Maternal Intercessor: Mary, Children, and Family Problems in Late Antique Infancy Gospel Traditions and their Medieval Trajectories," in *Christian Apocryphal Texts for the New Millennium: Achievements, Prospects, and Challenges. Proceedings of the International Workshop Held in Ottawa, September 30th – October 1st, 2006* (ed. Pierluigi Piovanelli; Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha; Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming). For further studies on the *Transitus Mariae* literature, see also Shoemaker, *Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, 49–51, for an introduction to earliest Dormition Traditions.

³⁹ Smith Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca*, x. See also Horn's study on the history of transmission and the connection between the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Transitus Mariae* in respect to "recycled apocrypha." Horn posits four stages of transmission for the History of the Virgin Mary and addresses questions concerning the manuscript history surrounding the sources for the tradition of the Lives of Mary; see her "Model Virgin," 1–44.

⁴⁰ De Strycker, *La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 35–36; Émile Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et Ses Remaniements Latins* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910), 65–67.

⁴¹ Eduard Sachau, *Verzeichnis der Syrisches Handschriften der kgl. Bibliothek zu Berlin*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1899), 676.

⁴² E. Nestle, "Ein Syrisches Bruchstück aus dem *Protevangelium Jacobi*," *ZNW* 3 (1902): 86–87.

⁴³ Budge, *Vie Syriaque de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie* (London, 1899).

⁴⁴ De Strycker, *La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 35–36.

⁴⁵ Horn, "Intersections," 113–50.

The many surviving manuscripts and numerous translations of the *Protevangelium of James* confirm that its textual form was never wholly fixed. The rich evidence of its redaction-history and reception-history, however, also points to its continued popularity, particularly among Christians in the Eastern Church. Traditions from the *Protevangelium of James* were so well-known among eastern Christian communities that when the text was rediscovered and made accessible to the West by the French Humanist Guillaume Postel in the middle of the sixteenth century, he assumed that it was canonical in eastern orthodox churches.⁴⁶ Its early acceptance in the East is also suggested by its adoption into the liturgical year. Already by the fifth century CE, December 8th was widely celebrated as the Feast of the Nativity of Mary; by the eighth century, this holy day seems to have been almost universally observed.⁴⁷ On such occasions, portions of the *Protevangelium of James* seem to have been read and incorporated into sermons.⁴⁸

By contrast, the *Protevangelium of James*' transmission in western Christendom is more complex. There is only one extant Latin manuscript, which dates to the ninth century.⁴⁹ In the Latin West, the influence of the text seems to have been indirect, mostly mediated by other Marian apocrypha, like *Pseudo-Matthew*.⁵⁰ There are a number of possible reasons for the relative lack of popularity of the *Protevangelium of James* in the Latin West. During the fourth and fifth centuries, Jerome criticized the text because of its interpretation of the Gospels' references to the "brothers and

⁴⁶ On Guillaume Postel and his discovery of the *Protevangelium of James*, see Irena Backus, "Guillaume Postel, Théodore Bibliander et le 'Protévangile de Jacques,'" *Apocrypha* 6 (1995): 7–65; Daniels, "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 1–4; W.J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel 1510–1581* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 16.

⁴⁷ Daniels, "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 12.

⁴⁸ Daniels posits that the popularity of this text was so great that it influenced other sacred observance days, including the Feast of Joachim and Anna (celebrated on the 9th of September) and the Feast of the Presentation of the Mary in the Temple (on the 21st of November); "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 11–13.

⁴⁹ De Strycker, "Une Ancienne Version Latine du Protévangile de Jacques avec des extraits de la Vulgate de Matthieu 1–2 et Luc 1–2," *AnBoll* 83 (1965): 365–402. On the Latin reception of the *Protevangelium of James*, see Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Le Protévangile de Jacques latin dans l'homélie *Inquirendum est pour la fête de la Nativité de Marie*," *Apocrypha* 12 (2001): 99–153.

⁵⁰ De Strycker, "Ancienne Version Latine," 365–402; Amann, *Jacques et ses Remaniements Latins* for an introduction to, translation of, and commentary on the Latin version of the *Protevangelium of James*. Cf. also J. Gijsel, "Het *Protevangelium Jacobi* in het Latijn," *AnCl* 50 (1981): 351–66.

sisters" of Jesus (*Helv.* 11–16).⁵¹ The *Protevangelium of James* refers to Jesus' "brothers" as the sons of Joseph from a previous marriage – an interpretation that was also widely accepted by eastern Christians.⁵² Jerome, by contrast, insisted that all early references to Jesus' "brothers and sisters" should be interpreted as his cousins.⁵³ Convinced by Jerome's assessment, Popes Damascus and Innocent condemned the *Protevangelium of James* in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵⁴ Likewise, the so-called *Gelasian Decree* lists the book among *de libris... non recipiendis* ("books... not to be admitted"), along with other infancy gospels.⁵⁵ Continued attempts to suppress such traditions are suggested also by Pope Pius V's removal of the office of St. Joachim from the Roman books of daily prayer and readings in the sixteenth century as well as by the suppression of the text of the *Presentation of Mary*.⁵⁶

Despite such attempts to control the *Protevangelium of James* and related infancy gospels, apocryphal reflections on Mary's life remained popular. Although the *Protevangelium of James* does not seem to have circulated widely in Latin translation, traditions from this work were integrated into Latin infancy narratives such as the Latin *Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Gospel of the Nativity*. By the sixteenth century, when Postel "re-discovered" the *Protevangelium of James* and reintroduced the text into Europe, elements of the text were already familiar from Christian art and

⁵¹ Early references to Jesus' "brothers and sisters" have been debated for centuries. As early as the fourth century CE, three distinct views emerged as possible explanations of such references. The Helvidian view held that Jesus' brothers and sisters were in fact Mary's and Joseph's children (e.g., countered by Jerome in *Helv.* 11–17; cf. Matt 15:55–56; Mark 6:3); the third century North African Christian Tertullian, as well as a number of modern scholars, supports this thesis (*Carn. Chr.* 3). The second view was initially proposed first by the late fourth century heresiologist Epiphanius of Salamis, namely, that they were the children of Joseph from a previous marriage (*Pan.* 78.8.1; 78.9.6). Finally, the fifth century Jerome held that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were not Jesus' siblings but rather his cousins; the children belonged to Mary, the wife of Alphaeus, and sister-in-law of the Virgin Mary. For a discussion on these three views, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 316–32; Richard Bauckham, "The Brother and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphanian Response to John P. Meier," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 686–700.

⁵² Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65.

⁵³ See Jerome, *Helv.* 11–16; also Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65.

⁵⁴ Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65; also Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 423.

⁵⁵ Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65. The irony, of course, is that the so-called *Gelasian Decree* is a sixth century forgery (perhaps composed in Gaul) that claims to have been penned by Gelasius, bishop of Rome in 492–96 CE. In other words, this text that condemns apocrypha is itself apocryphal.

⁵⁶ Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 418.

literature.⁵⁷ Even Pius V's removal of St. Joachim's office and the Presentation of Mary from the breviary in the sixteenth century was eventually overturned and the prayers restored.⁵⁸

B. The *Protevangelium of James* in Modern Scholarship

Despite its apparent popularity in pre-modern times, the *Protevangelium of James* has not garnered extensive scholarly interest until relatively recently. In comparison to NT literature and Patristic writings, for instance, very little has been written about the *Protevangelium of James*. Moreover, as noted above, past research focused primarily on issues such as its transmission, versions, date, authorship, and provenance.⁵⁹

Concurrent with the growth of scholarly interest in Christian apocrypha in the decades after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945, a new concern for the literary aspects of the *Protevangelium of James* has arisen.⁶⁰ Studies have explored the narrative's themes and unique features as well as its use of literary techniques. François Bovon, for instance, has examined the literary trope of "suspension of time" in *Protevangelium of James* 18 as well as argued that its overall narrative structure conveys a coherent meaning.⁶¹ Likewise, John L. Allen discusses questions about its literary genre challenging the traditional categorization of the text as an "infancy gospel" and suggesting *historia* may be a less anachronistic classification.⁶²

Another area of recent research has been the text's intertextual relationships. Scholars have long noted that the vocabulary found in the *Protevangelium of James* consists mainly of terms also found in the LXX.⁶³ In his

⁵⁷ For the influence of the *Protevangelium of James* on Christian art and literature, see n. 2 above.

⁵⁸ Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 418.

⁵⁹ This research will be surveyed in Chapter One below.

⁶⁰ See J.D. Turner and A. MacGuire, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) and review by K. Rudolph (trans. D.D. Walker) in *JR* 79 (1999): 452–57.

⁶¹ François Bovon, "The Suspension of Time in Chapter 18 of *Protevangelium Jacobi*," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester* (ed. B. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 393–405.

⁶² John L. Allen, "The 'Protevangelium of James' as an 'Historia': The Insufficiency of the 'Infancy Gospel' Category," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 508–17.

⁶³ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 9–12; See also, Amann, *Jacques et ses Remaniements Latins*, 62, 129, 180, 185, 229, 271; P. van Stempvoort, "The *Protevangelium Jacobi*: The Sources of its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on its Date," in *Studia*

Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary, H.R. Smid pursues an extensive analysis of those instances in which the *Protevangelium of James* appears to cite the LXX and to borrow specific phrases. One example is the oath formula of “As the Lord God Lives,” which is a common Septuagintal phrase, found in LXX Ruth 3:13 and LXX 1 Sam 1:39, as well as in Judith 8:19 and 13:16. In the *Protevangelium of James*, this phrase is employed numerous times throughout the narrative (e.g., *Prot. Jas.* 4:2; 6:3; 13:10; 15:13, 15; 19:19).⁶⁴

Hock also notes that the author “drew on the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, for historical analogies, turns of phrase, and information about Jewish life and practices.”⁶⁵ In accordance with Hock, E. Cothenet notes that, “Il est intéressant de repérer les passages bibliques qui sont réemployés.”⁶⁶ Anna’s lament over her childlessness, for instance, draws on the models of the despair of Sarah and Hannah because of their barrenness (Gen 16:1–6; 1 Sam 1:6–16), as well as Judith’s pain over her widowhood (Jdt 8:2–6). Even when Joseph returns home to find Mary pregnant, his initial reaction is to compare himself to Adam, who, upon returning to his wife Eve, found her alone, deceived, and corrupted (*Prot. Jas.* 13:5).⁶⁷ Minor characters are also absorbed and re-created in this

Evangelica III (ed. F.L. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964) 415–19; Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4261–62; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 21–22.

⁶⁴ Contrast W.S. Vorster, “The *Protevangelium of James* and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.F.J. Klijn* (ed. T. Baarda, et al.; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1988), 262–75, which suggests we should re-evaluate our understanding of its intertextuality. He challenges Smid’s conclusion that there is a deliberately intertextual relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and the LXX, as based on the former’s use of words and phrases that also occur in the latter. He proposes that the function of a source can vary. A source can be conceived simply as a body of knowledge available to the author or, more elaborately, as a pretext that the author “used, rejected, absorbed, and transformed” in order to produce meaning and to retell his own story creatively. Vorster attributes the many references common to the *Protevangelium of James* and the LXX to convention, since the content contained within the LXX, NT literature, and early Christian writings are very similar. He argues that the author did not simply rewrite a text, but rather created a text in response to the inadequacies of the canonical versions, which referred to other texts and thus developed interplay between them. As such, Vorster accounts for the similar words and expressions used by the author as simply a result of his language, which resembles biblical thoughts and expressions. He maintains that the motifs from stories such as that of Hannah (1 Sam 1:1–8) are the only cases in which we can speak of intertextual relationships.

⁶⁵ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 21.

⁶⁶ Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4261.

⁶⁷ The parallel between Joseph and Adam – and thus Mary and Eve – has been a primary focus of consideration for centuries. This idea interprets Mary as a “new” or “second” Eve. Justin Martyr was the first church father to advance the Eve – Mary comparison (*Dial.* 100), but it was Irenaeus of Lyons who was responsible for producing a critical

narrative as seen with Euthine, who is brought into the story to taunt Anna over her childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 2:6) in a manner that recalls the role of Penninah, the second wife of Elkannah, in 1 Sam 1:6.

In his *Infancy Gospel of James*, Hock also notes parallels between the *Protevangelium of James* and Greco-Roman novels. Of particular interest for Hock are two novels composed between 50 and 250 CE, namely, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Perhaps the particular style and motifs of these Greek romances sparked interest in the author of the *Protevangelium of James*; Anna’s lament scene, for instance, seems to convey an awareness of the numerous laments depicted in these and similar novels. Hock proposes that the parallels between these texts go beyond simply form. As with Daphnis in Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, for instance, the *Protevangelium of James* places Anna’s lament in a garden.⁶⁸ In addition, Joseph’s reaction when he discovers Mary is pregnant (*Prot. Jas.* 13:1–5) echoes, both in content and language, Clitophon’s lament in Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*.⁶⁹ Even the bitter water test to prove Mary’s purity (*Prot. Jas.* 16:3–5) recalls the water test conducted on Leucippe for the same reason.⁷⁰

Of special interest for the present study are parallels in the depictions of σωφροσύνη (self-control) and παρθενία (state of virginity). Hock notes that the theme of purity and virginity is a fundamental element in many Greco-Roman romances; in his view, these models may have influenced the ways in which Mary’s exceptional state of purity is described in the *Protevangelium of James*.⁷¹

Mary F. Foskett pursued further work in this area in her 2002 book, *A Virgin Conceived*, and subsequent papers.⁷² In order to explore the multiple meanings and images that the term *parthenos* and virginity play in an

discourse and analysis of the parallel (*Haer.* 3.21.4). See discussion in Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 39–52 for a survey of the issues surrounding this connection, especially as they lead up to the *Theotokos* controversy. See also Leena Mari Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 128–34.

⁶⁸ Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 4.28.2; cf. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 25–26.

⁶⁹ Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 5.11.3; cf. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 26.

⁷⁰ Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 8.8.3; 6.1–5; 13.1–14.2; cf. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 25–27.

⁷¹ Hock assesses purity as the underlying theme and purpose of the text in *Infancy Gospel of James*, 14–20. Both Gaventa and Foskett also stress that the *Protevangelium of James*’ depiction of Mary’s purity is one that stresses her exceptionality; Gaventa, *Mary*, 100–122, esp. 110, and Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 141–64; and discussion below.

⁷² Foskett, “Virginity as Purity” 67–76; eadem, “Miriam/Mariam/Maria: Literary Genealogy and the Genesis of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*,” in *Mariam, The Magdalen, and The Mother* (ed. Deirdre Good; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 63–74.

cient literature, Foskett examines several ancient narratives that feature virginal protagonists, including *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, OT pseudepigrapha like *Joseph and Aseneth*, and Christian apocrypha such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and *Acts of Peter*. Her examination of these sources also informs her analysis of the construction of Mary as “parthenos” in Luke-Acts and the *Protevangelium of James*.

With regard to *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Foskett suggests that the emphasis on virginity in these stories extends beyond simply presenting virginal protagonists. Like the *Protevangelium of James*, these stories are not only concerned with virginity and purity, but also with proving and maintaining this state. Accordingly, several scenes (*Prot. Jas.* 16:3; 20:1) are devoted to the questioning and public testing of a woman’s virginity.⁷³

Foskett also draws attention to the importance of virginity in *Joseph and Aseneth*.⁷⁴ She reads this text as a first century CE narrative that responds to the report, in Gen 41:45, of Pharaoh giving Aseneth, the daughter of Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis, to Joseph for his wife.⁷⁵ Similarities between this story and the *Protevangelium of James* can be seen most clearly in the concern for maintaining a living environment free from impurities.⁷⁶ Aseneth lives in a tower connected to her father’s house. Like Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*, she is only allowed to socialize and interact with other virgins (*Jos. Asen.* 2:5);⁷⁷ Aseneth is waited upon by seven virgins, all of the same age and born on the same night (*Jos. Asen.* 2:6). Moreover, Aseneth’s virginity is secured by her enclosed chambers, which are guarded from the outside by eighteen young men. In addition, the ornaments of her virginity hang in her room, which contains a bed in which she slept alone (“a man or woman never sat on it, only Aseneth alone”; *Jos. Asen.* 2:9).⁷⁸ The image of Aseneth’s quarters thus recalls

⁷³ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 81–98.

⁷⁴ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 98–104.

⁷⁵ There is no consensus about when *Joseph and Aseneth* was written. In 1889 when A.D. Battifol produced the first critical edition from a Syriac version in the mid-sixth century, he dated the work to the fourth – fifth centuries and believed it was Christian in origin. Since the twentieth century, most scholars have affirmed the text as Jewish, with perhaps some Christian interpolations, and attribute it to a much earlier origin, probably in the first to second centuries CE. See C. Burchard, “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (ed. James H. Charlesworth; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 187. However, Ross Kraemer, in her more recent book, *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) is inclined to push for a “late antique” date, and suggest that it perhaps was even written by Christians.

⁷⁶ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 145.

⁷⁷ This translation and thus numbering system is taken from Burchard, “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” 204.

⁷⁸ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 98–104.

Mary’s bedroom sanctuary in the *Protevangelium of James* (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4–5) and her mother’s determination to keep her free from all things unclean and impure (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4–5).

As Foskett shows, the theme of virginity is similarly central to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Like the *Protevangelium of James*, this story features a leading character portrayed as pure and virginal. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla is persuaded by Paul’s teachings and decides to reject her marriage and commit herself to a life of chastity (*Acts Paul Thec.* 7).⁷⁹ For Thecla, the preservation of her virginity remains her power and the key to her success and survival. In the novel, she is twice sentenced by the governor, twice condemned to death, and twice saved by divine intervention. Again the testing of virginity is a prominent theme. Yet, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla never yields to marriage,⁸⁰ in contrast to Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*.

When dealing with the narratives about Mary in Luke-Acts and the *Protevangelium of James*, Foskett suggests that both narratives exploit the multiple meanings of “virginity” in their representations and characterizations of Mary. She argues, however, that it is the *Protevangelium of James* that summons the potent connection between virginity and purity.⁸¹ Foskett proposes that Mary’s virginity in the narrative becomes the expression of purity and holiness *par excellence*, resulting in purity so absolute and unique that she becomes a model no other woman can replicate.

In this assertion, Foskett builds on the insights of Gaventa’s 1999 book, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*. Gaventa here attempts to recover the various images of Mary by examining how she is characterized in multiple and differing literary sources (both canonical and extra-canonical). Gaventa’s task to retrieve the “real Mary” is primarily literary, and thus her exploration is heavily dependent upon addressing questions that deal specifically with the ways in which early Christian writers portrayed Mary as a character and the role(s) she played in their representations of the story surrounding Jesus. After exploring Mary’s role in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Gaventa devotes an entire chapter to the *Protevangelium of James*, whereby she examines how Mary functions as a character by means of her speech, description, actions, and interactions with other characters. Gaventa determines that the *Protevangelium of James* portrays Mary’s entire life (conception, birth, infancy, adolescence, and adulthood) as one to



⁷⁹ My citations are taken from the translation by Schneemelcher, “*Acts of Paul and Thecla*,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, vol. 2 (ed. W. Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; London: James Clarke & Co, 1992), 240.

⁸⁰ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 104–8.

⁸¹ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 141ff. See also her “*Virginity as Purity*,” 67–76.

tally and completely enclosed in sacred space, embodying what she terms “sacred purity.”⁸² Although Gaventa does not limit her understanding of Mary’s purity to simply her virginity,⁸³ she also compares the *Protevangelium of James*’ Mary primarily with Thecla, the virginal heroine in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. She argues that they share the status of a virgin, but they are significantly different; whereas Thecla’s actions are described in order to encourage and persuade other young women to a life of chastity and purity, Mary’s actions and interactions in the *Protevangelium of James* do not, in her view, provide any patterns for other women to follow. According to Gaventa, Mary’s purity sets her apart from others to the degree that she is no longer a model to emulate.⁸⁴

Although neither book focuses wholly on the *Protevangelium of James*, the works of Foskett and Gaventa thus establish that this text depicts Mary’s purity as exceptional, as is particularly evident in her status as the “Virgin of the Lord.” They show, moreover, how the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* ensures that any typical ways of contracting impurities are not threats for Mary.

Neither scholar, however, addresses the question of ritual impurity in any detail. Gaventa notes that the assumptions of ritual purity enter the story when Mary reaches adolescence and is asked to leave the Temple; she does not comment further than to assert that “the purity of Mary in this story vastly exceeds the requirements of ritual purity.”⁸⁵ Although Foskett addresses ritual impurity in her analysis, she does so only through the lens of Mary’s status as a virgin, consistent with the focus in her book. Issues of ritual impurity and the question of the possibility of Mary’s menstruation are addressed only secondarily and in broad terms.

While past scholarship on the *Protevangelium of James* has only obliquely intersected with concerns on Mary’s ritual purity, Jennifer A. Glancy’s more recent 2010 study, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies*,⁸⁶ perhaps offers the most relevant discussions relating to this concern. In her fourth chapter, Glancy offers an examination of competing stories in the early second and third centuries on the body of Mary in childbirth in which the *Protevangelium of James* is discussed. Focusing on the narrative of the body, Glancy examines the *Protevangelium of James* alongside the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Odes of Solomon* 19 in order to

explore “what stories are told by Mary’s childbearing body.”⁸⁷ Glancy contends that while these texts may suggest Mary’s body is unperturbed by childbirth and that there is theological meaning behind her undamaged body, the meaning ascribed in each case differs. Glancy’s study as a whole is devoted to the centrality of bodies in early Christianity from Paul to Augustine and her section on the *Protevangelium of James* functions as one small piece to a broader concern for how cultural habituation of bodies may tell and teach us of the inclinations of first century Christians. Her scholarship in this area is of particular interest to our study given her focus in the particularities surrounding Mary’s exceptional post-partum body, including a focus on discharges associated with menstruation and childbirth. Most important is her observation that the text is obsessed with Greco-Roman ideas surrounding purity, blood, and pollution, and her argument that Mary is protected from sexual activity, but also from the pollution of menarche.⁸⁸

C. Recent Research on Purity in Early Judaism and Christianity

In this book, I intend to build on these insights regarding the importance of the theme of purity in the *Protevangelium of James*. I suggest, however, that the interest in purity goes well beyond a concern for Mary’s virginity: the text’s focus on purity may reflect engagement with biblical and early rabbinic ideas about ritual and menstrual purity and perhaps even moral and genealogical purity,⁸⁹ in addition to early Christian ideas about sexual purity. In order to place the *Protevangelium of James*’ ideas into context and in conversation with a broader range of ideas on purity, my goal is to establish a “purity map” where I examine various views held on ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in order to establish where the *Protevangelium of James* should be located on the “map.” Since an important aim in this study is to explore our text’s relationship with Judaism, my discussion draws upon biblical, Qumranic, rabbinical, and other early Jewish writings, including those of Philo and Josephus, as well as nascent Christian sources such as gospel material and Pauline literature.⁹⁰

⁸² Gaventa, *Mary*, 100–122, esp. 110.

⁸³ She does, however, note that the author often identifies Mary as such; i.e., as “virgin of the Lord,” or “virgin from the temple of the Lord,” (see *Prot. Jas.* 9:7, 13:3, 15:6, also 10:2, 19:18).

⁸⁷ Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 82.

⁸⁸ See Chapter Two, where I discuss Glancy’s assertion regarding Mary’s menarche in further detail.

⁸⁹ See discussion of Christine Hayes’ contribution below.

⁹⁰ Consequently, a detailed discussion of Greco-Roman influences on our text will not be included in this discourse. Fortunately, Foskett’s important 2002 study does precisely this in the context of virginity and is easily consulted.

⁸⁴ Gaventa, *Mary*, 120–22.

⁸⁵ Gaventa, *Mary*, 110.

⁸⁶ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Without doubt previous scholarship abounds with excellent explorations into purity and impurity in biblical and early Jewish and Christian writings. Jonathan Klawans' seminal *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, which builds upon the works of David Hoffmann, Adolph Büchler, Mary Douglas, Jacob Neusner, Jacob Milgrom, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David P. Wright,⁹¹ considers biblical and Second Temple Jewish conceptions and terminology concerning ritual purity as distinct from moral impurity.⁹² This study is not a book on how to understand and decipher Jewish and Christian ideas, concepts, and terms on purity and impurity nor is it a survey of the history of scholarship on purity. It is, however, a study which explores the differing views, meanings, and understandings of purity and impurity in early Jewish and Christian literature in order to flesh out the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. In this way, Klawans' ideas on the relationship between impurity and sin in various early Jewish sources including biblical, Second Temple, and Qumran sectarian sources especially as they relate to the impurities related to the female life-cycle (birth, menstruation, childbirth) are especially influential to the interpretation and reading of our text.

Equally important is Klawans' 2006 contribution entitled *Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*.⁹³ In this compelling work, Klawans examines Jerusalem's temple cult and its connection to purity and sacrifice. Given that I suggest in my study that the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas about ritual purity are

⁹¹ For a brief description of their contributions to this area of research see the beginning of Chapter Two and n. 2–8 therein.

⁹² Jonathan Klawans notes that in contrast to moral impurity, ritual impurity includes defilements delineated in Leviticus 11–15 and Numbers 19, which typically arise from unavoidable impurities such as birth, death, sex, disease and other circumstances. Ritual impurities thus reflect the conditions of normal life and, as such, are not sinful. The consequence of this type of impurity is temporary exclusion from participation in certain ritual acts and lack of contact with the sacred and its precincts. These impurities are by nature impermanent and can be reversed through the passage of time and/or procedures of purification through water. The resolution for acts of moral impurity, by contrast, is much more difficult. Moral impurities are considered grave sins (i.e., idolatry, incest, murder) that affect and defile not only the sinner, but also the sacred land and sanctuary. Unlike ritual impurities, moral impurities cannot be removed by rites of purification and are long-lasting, if not permanent conditions. A return to moral purity is only achievable through punishment, atonement, exile, or by refraining from committing the morally impure act in the first place. For a detailed discussion on the differences between ritual and moral impurity practices held in ancient Judaism i.e., both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Second Temple period, see *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also my discussion in Chapter Two.

⁹³ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Ra'anan Boustan's review of this study in *AJS Review* 32 (2008): 169–72.

best represented in its persistent interest in the Temple and its sacrificial cult, Klawans' tandem study of ritual sacrifice and ritual purity, as well as his suggestion that they can both be understood socially and symbolically, works towards deciphering ideas on the presentation of the sacrificial cult in our text. Particularly significant is his proposal that the symbolism found in both purity and sacrificial rules is most meaningfully expressed in theological ideas surrounding the wish to imitate God (*Imitatio Dei*), and the concern to attract and maintain God's presence in the Temple.⁹⁴ The idea that God dwells in the sanctuary will be especially interesting in light of the *Protevangelium of James*' depiction of Mary's body as being akin to the sacred space of a sanctuary and as the chosen locale for the temporary dwelling of the Son of God, thus making Mary's womb Jesus' prenatal sanctuary.

In the same way Klawans' insights have helped attained fruitful meaning and multifaceted understandings of purity within biblical and Second Temple Jewish literature, Hannah Harrington's attempt to reconstruct the purity systems envisioned by the Qumran sectarians and the Rabbis through detailed definitions, diagrams, and comparative charts have allowed for important comparisons for the presentation of purity found within the *Protevangelium of James*.⁹⁵ Drawing and building on the contributions by Joseph M. Baumgarten,⁹⁶ and her mentors Jacob Milgrom⁹⁷ and

⁹⁴ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 56–68 on *Imitatio Dei*; 68–73 on attracting and maintaining God's presence in the sanctuary.

⁹⁵ Hannah Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (SBLDS 143; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993); ideam, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004).

⁹⁶ Joseph M. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); idem, "The Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L.H. Schiffman; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 13–24; idem, "The Purification Rituals of DJD 7," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 199–209; idem, "Zab Impurity in Qumran and Rabbinic Law," *JJS* 45 (1994): 273–78; idem, *Qumran Cave XIII: The Damascus Document* (4Q266–273) (DJD 18; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); and idem, "The Purification Liturgies," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years, II* (ed. P. Flint and J.C. Vanderkam; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 202–12, to name a few.

⁹⁷ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3, 3A, 3B; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001); idem, "Rationale for Cultic Law: The Case of Impurity," *Semeia* 45 (1989): 103–9; idem, "The Scriptural Foundations and Deviations in the Laws of Purity of the Temple Scroll," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L.H. Schiffman; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 83–99; idem, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (ed. Jacob Neusner; SJLA 36; Leiden: Brill, 1983), and idem, "The Purification Rule (4Q514=4QOrd^c)," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations, I, Rule of the Community and Related Documents* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), 177–79, to name a few.

Daniel Boyarin,⁹⁸ Harrington provides significant insights and conversations on the issue of purity in term of its relationship to holiness and its distinction from moral impurity within Qumranic and Rabbinic literature, thus helping us understand and accurately position the *Protevangelium of James*' views of purity in relation to ideas expressed in these important sources.⁹⁹

As mentioned earlier, my concern for Mary's purity in the *Protevangelium of James* far pass the boundaries of her presentation as sexually pure. For this reason, Christine E. Hayes' work in this area is significant to my discussion,¹⁰⁰ particularly regarding not only her understandings of the two traditional categories concerning Jewish purity laws (ritual and moral), but also her unique contribution of a third category, namely, genealogical impurity.¹⁰¹ Hayes' convincing argument in her concern for understanding early Jewish self-definition and the boundaries perceived between Jews and Gentiles continuously intersect with my concerns with our text. Moreover, her findings regarding rabbinic self-conscious innovation and interpretation of Gentile ritual impurities inform my assessment and arguments on questions of Jewish and Christian selfhood and identity formation. In my fourth chapter on the characterization of Mary's sexual purity, Hayes' argument for a shift in early Christian understandings of impurity, which she sees as already developing in Paul's writing, towards the development

⁹⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁹⁹ Whether a single system of purity is in evidence in all these texts has been questioned by a number of scholars. See for instance, Ian C. Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2–3 and Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, and idem, his review in *JR* 88.1 (2008): 127–28. Both contributions will also be examined more closely in our study.

¹⁰⁰ Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and my review in *BMC Review* (2004).

¹⁰¹ In this context and in conversation with the works of Emil Schürer (*Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* [2 vols.; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs], 1886–1890), Adolf Büchler ("The Levitical Impurity of the Gentile in Palestine Before the Year 70," *JQR* 17 [1926]: 1–81; idem, "Family Purity and Family Impurity in Jerusalem Before the year 70 C.E.," in *Studies in Jewish History* [ed. I. Brodie and J. Rabinowitz; London: Oxford University Press, 1956], 64–98), Gedaliah Alon ("The Levitical Uncleanness of Gentiles," in *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World* [trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977], 146–89), and Klawans ("Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism," *AJS Review* 20.2 [1995]: 285–312 and his *Impurity and Sin* book cited above), Hayes argues convincingly that the issue at stake for intermarriage in the OT Apocrypha, OT Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the works of Josephus and Philo is primarily genealogical and therefore not ritual, as past scholarship has traditionally assumed; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, chs. 3–4; esp. 8–11, 58–59 on genealogical impurity.

of a concept of what she calls "carnal impurity,"¹⁰² has been particularly helpful for interpreting the presentation of Mary's paradoxical role as virgin and mother.

At the same time as Hayes' work broadly informs my interpretation of purity, I look to Charlotte E. Fonrobert's specific study on menstrual purity to offer detailed observations into the ways in which Mary's menstrual purity functions in our narrative. Fonrobert meticulously examines the gynaecological and physiological awareness embodied in the rabbinic laws of *niddah* as a way to better understand talmudic ideas about gender, purity, and sexuality.¹⁰³ Most relevant, for our purposes, is Fonrobert's treatment of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (DA), a third century Syrian Christian work that displays concerns that overlap with those in rabbinic literature, in both her book and subsequent paper.¹⁰⁴ In light of my examination of Mary's menstrual purity and reassessment of the provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*, Fonrobert's studies on menstrual purity laws within this community as both religio-ethnic markers as well as gender identity markers contributes significantly to understanding the politics of gender in rabbinic literature, the construction and control of women's bodies by rabbis, and the notion of "Jewish-Christian" relations in the third century as remaining in a state of flux.

D. Scope, Aims, and Structure

This study has two main interrelated goals: [1] to examine the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* with a specific focus on the place and function of the theme of purity; and [2] to analyze the structure, concerns, and interests of the narrative so as to suggest its possible temporal and geographical milieu. In the course of focusing on these two aims, I also hope to shed light on the text's relationship and connection to Judaism, particularly the extent of the author's knowledge of Jewish traditions

¹⁰² The concept of "carnal impurity," according to Hayes, is an extension of moral impurity and can be transmitted physically to other persons as it is linked to the body, but may also have moral consequences. For the avoidance of this type of impurity, the maintenance of sexual purity (i.e., virginity, chastity, celibacy) is central; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 4–16.

¹⁰³ Charlotte E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) and review by Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Blood, Identity, and Counter-Discourse: Rabbinic Writings on Menstruation," *Prooftexts* 23.2 (2003): 210–28.

¹⁰⁴ Fonrobert, "The *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus," *JECS* 9.4 (2001): 483–509.

and customs, specifically related to the purity laws of his time; his use of other Jewish textual sources; and the possibility of a "Jewish-Christian" origin.

In order to examine the depiction of Mary, I employ a literary approach to the text and build on the studies offered by Gaventa and Foskett in their literary quests for Mary and the place of purity in the narrative. Specifically, I mean to explore closely the presentation of Mary as a literary character and the roles she and others play in the narrative in order to highlight the text itself and the literary world that is created in the process. Inevitably, historical and theological inquiries will also be addressed since, as Gaventa has rightly observed, interpreting the literary aims of any early Christian text naturally evokes interest in the original audience and how they first read the narrative; in addition, theological issues are always found close at hand when dealing with questions surrounding the text's purpose and overall goal.¹⁰⁵ Thus history and theology will contextualize my primary focus, a literary analysis of how and in what ways the *Protevangelium of James* characterizes Mary. Proceeding inductively, I analyze the details of the narrative by focusing on aspects that reveal the characters. This process of "revealing the character" or paying attention to what Foskett describes as "character indicators"¹⁰⁶ involves focusing on the character's choices, speeches, and descriptions, as well as motives, attitudes, and moral nature, which Robert Alter suggests can be revealed through actions, appearance, gestures, posture, costume; "one character's comments on another; direct speech by the character; inward speech either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanation."¹⁰⁷ I employ these literary aspects while carefully examining the text.

Additionally, I intend to place my discussion of Mary's purity in context with and in relation to other ideas concerning purity in ancient Judaism as discussed briefly above. By surveying various views held on multiple concepts of purity in early Jewish sources, I will be better able to situate the *Protevangelium of James*' views on purity and highlight what concepts and practices found in our text seem to be influenced by or reflect an awareness of other early Jewish sources.

This focus on Mary's portrayal in the narrative will also reveal an intense focus on the theme of purity, not only in terms of depicting Mary's virginity, but also as a varying and multi-layered idea in the narrative that

¹⁰⁵ Gaventa, *Mary*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 116–

encompasses both the presentation of Mary and the structure of the narrative as a whole. Indeed, I maintain that the text's interest in ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity emerges as literary "postmarks," dividing the narrative into thematic parts with distinct purposes and goals. I suggest that the theme of purity is so significant that it may be used as a vehicle for revealing the text's multi-faceted interests and for hinting towards its possible temporal and geographical setting.

The first chapter considers questions of date, provenance, and genre. In the process, I discuss the debate over the *Protevangelium of James*' relationship to Judaism and outline the method for my own analysis of the text.

The second to fourth chapters, the Purity Chapters, offer a close literary analysis of the *Protevangelium of James*, pursued with a focus on the theme of purity. The references to purity in the *Protevangelium of James* can be divided into three general categories, corresponding to the three sections of the text outlined above. Each Purity Chapter begins with a description of the type of purity in question and surveys a number of early Jewish and nascent Christian sources on the topic in order to better situate our text's views. Chapter Two examines those references to purity that occur in the course of describing Mary's birth and early childhood. Here I seek to emphasize the importance of ritual purity in terms of the text's overarching interest in the Jerusalem Temple, its priests, and the Second Temple Jewish sacrificial system. Paying close attention to the author's shift in focus from the ritual purity of Mary's parents to the exceptional ritual purity of their own daughter, I suggest that Mary is described in terms that evoke a Temple sacrifice. Chapter Two thus carefully considers ritual purity, particularly in relation to sacrifice and the Temple.

Chapter Three builds on the text's thematic emphasis on purity suggested in Chapter Two, but now examined in reference to purity during the transitional period of Mary's life – her adolescent years, during which she leaves the Temple and enters into marriage. Most significant here is *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, which describes how priests sought to have Mary removed from the Temple because she, at the age of twelve, threatens to defile the pure space that had been her home since the age of three. This passage raises many questions – is the fear of pollution connected, in particular, to menstruation? And, if so, what would this circumstance mean for the text's depiction of Mary? What does this say about its assumptions about ritual purity and the female life-cycle? This chapter concentrates on the issue of menstrual purity and the ways in which the allusion to Mary's possible impurity functions in the text's characterization of this figure.

Chapter Four analyzes the text's treatment of Mary's marriage and the birth of Jesus. Central to the *Protevangelium of James*' concern with Mary's purity in this context are the descriptions of Jesus at Mary's breast

immediately after birth without any need for the usual purification rites (*Prot. Jas.* 19:16) and the declaration of Mary's innocence on all charges after she is forced to endure a physical examination to prove that she has remained virginal even after giving birth (*Prot. Jas.* 19:12–20:2). This chapter investigates the purity laws related to pregnancy and childbirth, particularly concerning virginity and post-partum pollution. Since this focus on sexual purity does not examine ideas on virginity and celibacy alone, but also within the context of marriage, I pay close attention to the author's description of Mary's relationship to Joseph as a commentary on Jewish ideas on marriages and betrothals.

Chapter Five revisits questions regarding the *Protevangelium of James'* date, provenance, and relationship to Judaism in light of my findings. In particular, I argue for a Syrian provenance and late second or early third century date. I support this assertion by examining particular characteristics of Syrian Christianity, including the text's possible "Jewish-Christian" origins, and Marcionite and docetic influence on the one hand, and Syrian ideas on marriage, virginity, asceticism, and the role of women, on the other. Thus I situate the *Protevangelium of James'* interest in ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in a West Syrian cultural context, with special reference to the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.

In my concluding chapter, I consider how the theme of purity contributes to the depiction of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. What does it mean that the author characterizes her as exceptionally pure, both by the standards of biblical and Jewish law and by the standards of early Christian views of virginity, yet as potentially participating in menstrual impurity? My concluding comments explore the implications of the one impurity by which Mary continues to be bound in light of her characterization as exceptionally pure and considers how this portrayal of Mary's relationship to ritual purity contributes to important discussions on understanding women, gender, and sexuality in antiquity.

Before turning to the date, provenance, and genre of the *Protevangelium of James*, a note on terminology will prove useful.

E. Terminology

Since my investigation of the *Protevangelium of James'* ideas on purity and suggestion of its possible provenance involve examining our text's relationship to Judaism, a note on terminology is necessary. When referring specifically to persons, groups, and sources associated with the NT Gospels and the Pauline corpus, I have chosen to use the term Christ-believers instead of Christians on its own, since this designation was not original for

those who claimed Jesus to be the messiah and is an anachronistic application for a first century context,¹⁰⁸ despite its use three times in the New Testament.¹⁰⁹ I will, however, employ the terms "Jewish Christianity" and "Jewish-Christians" with the use of quotation marks to describe the relationship of Judaism to our text, when applicable, and the influence of Judaism on Syrian Christianity, especially in my fifth chapter when the identity of Jesus' followers becomes particularly important. I am aware that the term "Jewish Christianity" is a scholarly construct with which neither the authors nor the writings discussed in this study or elsewhere identify themselves; neither do they refer to any of the groups they mention as "Jewish-Christian." In this regard the phrase is problematic inasmuch as it is anachronistic, inaccurate, imprecise, and misleading.¹¹⁰ I maintain, however, that the terms "Jewish-Christianity" and "Jewish-Christian" may still be useful for helping us understand the relationship between Judaism and Christianity during a time when the boundaries between these two traditions were still very much blurred, if we remember that these terms are exactly that, scholarly categories to help us understand these complex relationships.¹¹¹

My goal is not to provide a comprehensive history of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and their so-called parting of the ways, nor is it to discuss the vast scholarship on terminology, categories, and terms suggested to more accurately describe when Jewish and Christian identities became distinguishable from each other. Fortunately, we have excellent studies that provide not only critical discussions on this historical

¹⁰⁸ The term "Christian" is problematic in that our evidence from the mid-first century indicates that only those outside the movement referred to members of the church as "Christians." Jerry L. Sumney argues that when it is first used in Acts 11:26, it seems that they accepted this language whether they "first coined it, reluctantly accepted it, or enthusiastically embraced it." See his "Paul and Christ-Believing Jews Whom He Opposes," in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 58 for further discussion.

¹⁰⁹ Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16. Cf. John Gager, "Paul, the Apostle of Judaism," in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust* (ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 56–76.

¹¹⁰ See especially Sumney's and John W. Marshall's contributions in Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) and Jackson-McCabe's discussion on the various suggestions put forth for alternative terminology.

¹¹¹ See further Joan E. Taylor, "The Phenomenon of Early Jewish-Christianity: Reality or Scholarly Invention?," *VC* 44 (1990): 313–34 and David Frankfurter, "Beyond 'Jewish Christianity': Continuing Religious Sub-Cultures of the Second and Third Centuries and Their Documents," in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 131–43.

process(es),¹¹² but also important suggestions for alternative terminology.¹¹³ “Jewish Christianity” has often been understood as a tradition that combines, for the most part, Jewish observances with Christian faith. Scholars often use the term “Jewish-Christian” to designate [1] ethnically Jewish or Torah-observant persons who believe Jesus as Christ and his role in salvation history; [2] persons of any ethnicity that combine Jewish practices such as Torah-observance with Christian beliefs such as Jesus as Christ messiah; and [3] persons who use Jewish cultural or literary forms to express their Christianity.¹¹⁴ Throughout this study, the use of the term “Jew-

¹¹² On when and where “Judaism” and “Christianity” “parted ways,” see the various models offered by James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), esp. 238; idem, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1992), 367–68; Lawrence Schiffman, “At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2 (ed. E.P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 155–56; and Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). For critiques of this “parting of ways” model, see for e.g., Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); idem, *Border Lines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?: Constructing Early Christianity* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002); Adele Reinhartz, “A Fork in the Road or a Multi-Lane Highway? New Perspectives on the ‘Parting of the Ways’ Between Judaism and Christianity,” in *The Changing Face of Judaism: Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (ed. I. Henderson and G. Oegama; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 278–329; and the contributions in Adam H. Becker’s and Annette Y. Reed’s edited volume, *Ways That Never Parted*.

¹¹³ For recent studies on terminology, see the important contributions by Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. B. Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92; Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512; and the contributions in Matt Jackson-McCabe’s edited volume, *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*, especially Luomanen and Jones in this volume since both still argue that the term “Jewish-Christianity” may still be somewhat useful. See also Jones, “Jewish Christianity of the Pseudo-Clementines,” in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian “Heretics”* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 315–44; Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Sean Freyne, “Behind the Names: Samaritans, Ioudaioi, Galileans,” in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson* (ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 389–401, for useful discussion on names and naming in the ancient world.

¹¹⁴ J. Carleton Paget provides a good survey and discussion of scholarly attempts at defining this difficult term, of which the three possibilities listed above are discussed. See his “Jewish Christianity,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Early Roman*

ish-Christian” draws heavily on, but is not limited to, the first definition above and is of particular importance for Chapter Five.

Period, vol. 3 (ed. William Horbury, W.D. Davies, and John Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 731–75, esp. 733–42 for definitions.

Chapter One

Date, Provenance, and Genre

Before turning to a literary analysis of the *Protevangelium of James* and an examination of the theme of purity therein, a consideration of the date, provenance, and genre of the text is necessary. The *Protevangelium of James* is a pseudonymous work, which claims to have been written by James (likely, James the brother of Jesus; *Prot. Jas.* 25:1). Pseudonymous writings are notoriously difficult to situate and date, since they maintain, from the start, to have been written by someone else and at another time.¹ The *Protevangelium of James* is no exception: the inferences about date, authorship, and provenance that can be extracted from the text are indirect, at best, and often ambiguous or inconclusive. These factors pose a challenge for scholarly attempts to reconstruct its precise aims and context. Accordingly, questions about its date, provenance, aims, and context have been hotly debated in modern research.

This chapter surveys the history of research on these questions in order to lay the groundwork for my literary analysis of the narrative in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. Thus, the primary purpose of this chapter will be to map out the possible cultural and historical contexts in which to understand the text's interests and concern with purity. In the process, however, I also hope to clarify further how the approach to the *Protevangelium of James* in this study relates to previous studies. I propose, in particular, that a literary approach may help shed new light on the question of the aims, date, and genre of the text, and that the possibility of a Syrian provenance can be further illuminated through a consideration of its traditions about ritual and sexual purity in relation to contemporaneous rabbinic Jewish and Syrian Christian sources.

¹ Scholars have assumed that James, the brother of Jesus, could not have authored the text since the material found in the story is dependent upon gospel traditions found in Matthew and Luke. On this, see Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 8–9. Cf. Boyd Lee Daniels, “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*” (2 vols.; PhD diss., Duke University, 1956), 1.2–4.

A. Dating the Protevangelium of James

A broad range of dates have been proposed for the *Protevangelium of James*, from as early as the mid-second century CE to as late as the fifth century CE. At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars tended to favour a later date. Current consensus, however, is that an earlier date is more probable, with most scholars favouring the late second century to early third century CE.²

A re-assessment of the date of the *Protevangelium of James* resulted from the discovery of the early fourth century Papyrus Bodmer V in 1952, which sets the *terminus ad quem* for the text.³ Since this discovery, scholars have sought support for early dating in the evidence of early Patristic literature, proposing that second and third century Christian authors may have been familiar with the *Protevangelium of James*.

Most commonly cited in this regard are Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) and Origen (ca. 185–254).⁴ Clement mentions details about the life of Mary absent from the NT Gospels but included in the *Protevangelium of James*. These details center on Mary's *virginitas in partu* (*Prot. Jas.* 9:8; 19:18) and occur in the context of Clement's discussion of a midwife who attends Mary and claims that she is indeed a virgin in *Strom.* 7.16.⁵ Clement refers to this declaration made directly after Mary gives birth:

² Oscar Cullmann, "The Protevangelium of James," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 423; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 1995, 11. Also Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 6–12 and 412–18; É. Cothenet, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: Origine, Genre et Signification d'un Premier Midrash Chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1998): 4257; Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 108.

³ See the Introduction above, as well as the detailed discussion in de Strycker, "Die Griechischen Handschriften des Protevangeliums Iacobi," in *Griechische Kodikologie und Textüberlieferung* (ed. D. Harlfinger; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 579.

⁴ E.g. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11; P.A. van Stempvoort, "The Protevangelium Jacobi: The Sources of its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on its Date," in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F.L. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 415; Paul Foster, "The Protevangelium of James," *Exptim* 118.12 (2007): 574; idem, "The Protevangelium of James," in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 112–13; de Strycker, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques," in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 418; W. Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustradition* (FRLANT 139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 224 n. 69, to name a few.

⁵ Other witnesses to Mary's *virginitas in partu* include the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Odes of Solomon* (Ode 19). Both texts attest to Mary's conception and birth as being mi-

A. Dating the Protevangelium of James

But, just as most people even now believe, as it seems, that Mary ceased to be a virgin through the birth of her child, though this was not really the case – for some say that she was found by the midwife to be a virgin [παρθένος] after the delivery (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.16.93).⁶

Whereas Clement is vague about his source ("some say"), his younger contemporary Origen is more explicit. In his *Commentary on Matthew* (*Comm. Matt.* 10:17),⁷ Origen makes reference to Jesus' brothers as belonging to Joseph from a previous marriage, in the context of discussing Jesus' brethren, and he names the "Gospel of Peter" or the "Book of James" as his sources:

As for the brothers of Jesus, some people pretend [i.e., the people in the synagogue in Jesus' hometown, cf. Matt 13:5], by leaning on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter, or as it is entitled, the Book of James [Τῆς βίβλου Ἰακώβου], that they would be the sons of Joseph, born from a former woman whom he would have lived with before Mary (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10:17).⁸

Traditions about Joseph's sons by a previous marriage are found in *Prot. Jas.* 9:8, 17:2, 5. In fact, Joseph's protest against taking Mary as a wife at

raculous and to her perpetual virginity after giving birth. See J.C. Plumpe, "Some Little-Known Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in Partu*," *TS* 9 (1948): 567–77. So also F. Buck, "Are the 'Ascension of Isaiah' and the 'Odes of Solomon' Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary?," in *De Primordiis Cultus Marianus IV* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Maria- na Internationalis, 1970), 371–99, esp. 379.

⁶ Άλλ, ὡς ἔοικεν τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ μέχρι νῦν δοκεῖ ή Μαριάμ λεχώ εἶναι διὰ τὴν τοῦ παιδίου γέννησιν, οὐκ οὖσα λεχώ (καὶ γὰρ μετὰ τὸ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν μαιωθεῖσαν φασί τινες παρθένον εύρεθῆναι) (*Strom.* 7.16.93). Greek and English translations are cited from Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies Book VII* (ed. and trans. Fenton John Anthony Hort and Joseph B. Mayor; GP 9; New York: Garland, 1987), 164–65.

⁷ Origen (c.185–c.254), probably born in Alexandria, was an active writer in biblical critique, exegesis and theology. The majority of his literary activity took place from c. 218 to 230. When conflict broke out in Alexandria in connection with the emperor Caracalla, he went to Palestine where he was ordained as a priest. When Origen was deposed of his priesthood, he found refuge in Caesarea (231), where he established his famous school and continued his literary work, which included his commentaries on Matthew and John. These commentaries seem to have been written in the last years of Origen's life as Decius' persecutions (250) prevented Origen from continuing and completing them. For an introduction to his life and writings, see Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1–62 and John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 1–24.

⁸ Τοὺς δὲ ἀδελφοὺς Ἰησοῦ φασί τινες εἶναι, ἐκ παραδόσεως ὄρμωμενοι τοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένου κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγελίου ἡ τῆς βίβλου Ἰακώβου, υἱοὺς Ἰωσῆφ ἐκ προτέρας γυναικὸς συνωκηκούιας αὐτῷ πρὸ τῆς Μαρίας; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10:17 (SC 162, 216–17; English translations are my own, but the French translation by Robert Girod was also consulted).

Prot. Jas. 9:8, even though he has been selected by God for this task, is based on the fact that he is old and already has children. In the context of registering his family for Augustus' census, Joseph again makes reference to his sons and Samuel is even named as one of them. If Origen's reference to "the Book of James" does indeed refer to the *Protevangelium of James*, then it might be possible to place its *terminus ad quem* in the third century CE.⁹

The most thoroughgoing attempt to suggest a precise date for the *Protevangelium of James*, by drawing on Patristic literature, has been that of P.A. van Stempvoort¹⁰ who places the composition of the text between 178 and 204 CE, contemporary with Clement and Origen, as well as Tertullian (ca. 160–225).¹¹ To the commonly-cited parallels in Clement and Origen quoted above, he adds passages from Tertullian's *De Carne Christi* (7.230), which describe Tertullian's refusal to accept the possibility of Jesus' brothers and sisters as belonging to Joseph's previous marriage as well as his denial of the lasting virginity of Mary (*non virgo quantum a partu*).¹² These references, in his view, establish the wide circulation of the *Protevangelium of James* by the third century CE.

⁹ Note that the *Protevangelium of James* is a title that was given to our text when Guillaume Postel reintroduced the document to the Latin West in 1552 and thus is not the original designation. The Papyrus Bodmer V has "Birth of Mary, Revelation of James," but even most recent editors have questioned whether the second half is original since some Greek manuscripts exclude the reference to James (Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 4; Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 423). If James was not always included in the title, it is worth asking if Origen was indeed making reference to our text. Origen's lack of a precise title for his source (i.e., "Gospel According to Peter and "Book of James), however, seems to indicate his concern more for the content than title. Origen's reference to both the "Gospel according to Peter" or the "Book of James" for his source is noteworthy. The extant texts seem to suggest no direct parallels between the two sources since the *Protevangelium of James* focuses mainly on Mary and her conception and birth of Jesus, whereas the *Gospel of Peter* is centered on Jesus' passion narrative. On their study of the Greek manuscript of the *Gospel of Peter*, however, Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas remind us that the manuscript is so fragmented that it is difficult to determine exactly what the original gospel contained. Since the whole of the *Gospel of Peter* is not available, it may also be worth pondering the possibility that the original contained an infancy story since Origen seems to refer to the *Gospel of Peter* as a text which comments on the virgin birth; see *Das Petrusvangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (GCS NF 11; NA 1; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 3–8, 16.

¹⁰ Van Stempvoort, "The *Protevangelium Jacobi*," 410–26.

¹¹ Van Stempvoort, "The *Protevangelium Jacobi*," 413–25.

¹² On Mary's *virginitas in partu*, Tertullian writes, "Consequently we recognize as a sign capable of being spoken against the conception and childbearing of Mary the virgin, concerning which these Academics say, 'She bare and bare not, virgin and no virgin.' And yet, even though this expression were tolerable, it would be one more suitable for us

To argue for a *terminus a quo* of 178 CE for the dating of the *Protevangelium of James*, van Stempvoort appeals to the anti-Christian writings of the "pagan" author Celsus.¹³ He speculates that our text was penned as a direct response to Celsus' attacks on Mary,¹⁴ reconstructing the aim of the *Protevangelium of James* with references to the statements of Celsus now preserved in Origen's *Contra Celsum*.¹⁵ In his *True Doctrine*, Celsus appears to have slandered Jesus' mother on a number of counts. First, he sheds doubt on Mary's reputation by questioning the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth (*Cels.* 1.28).¹⁶ Second, Celsus writes that Jesus was not the son of a virgin, but rather born of a poor native woman from a Jewish, non-Greek village, who "spins for daily hire" (*Cels.* 1.28–32).¹⁷ Finally, he asserts that Mary's pregnancy should be considered a scandal, because she had committed adultery with a Roman soldier by the name of

to use: for she bare, seeing she did so of her own flesh, and she bare not, seeing she did so not of a man's seed, a virgin as regards her husband, not a virgin as regards childbearing: not however that the expression 'bare and bare not' implies that it was not of her flesh, or that 'virgin and not virgin' means that she was not from her own bowels a mother. With us, however, there is nothing doubtful, or that is twisted back into a plea that can recoil upon those who make it: light is light and darkness is darkness, and yea is yea and nay is nay, and what is more than this is on the side of evil. She bore which did bear: and if as a virgin she conceived, in her childbearing she became a wife. For she became a wife by that same law of the opened body, in which it made no difference whether the violence was of the male let in or let out: the same sex performed that unsealing (*Car. Chr.* 23)." Translation is from Ernest Evans, ed. and trans., *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation [Q. Septimii Florentis Tertulliani: de Carne Christi Liber]: The Text Edited with an Introduction Translation and Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1956), 77. See my discussion on Mary's eternal virginity in Chapter Four.

¹³ Van Stempvoort also makes references to Justin Martyr's writings (ca. 150 CE) as having possible connections to the *Protevangelium of James*, but he does not take these into consideration when determining his *terminus ad quem* for the text. The reference to the midwife for Mary in the *Odes of Solomon* (19:9) is also mentioned but not taken into account by van Stempvoort in his calculations for the dating of the text; "Protevangelium Jacobi," 412. Compare the view of Zervos, on which see below.

¹⁴ Van Stempvoort, "Protevangelium of Jacobi," 413–14.

¹⁵ Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). See also the excellent commentary on Celsus' writings in Horacio E. Lona, *Die "Wahre Lehre" des Kelso* (KFA 1; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005).

¹⁶ For the specific attacks by Celsus listed above, see Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–28. See also Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11 and Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 145–49 and references therein.

¹⁷ Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–32; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11; Schaberg, *Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 145–49 and references therein.

Panthera and was thus forced to give birth to Jesus in secret (*Cels.* 1.32 and 1.69).¹⁸

Van Stempvoort's suggested dating is thus predicated on his theory that the *Protevangelium of James* was written as an apology. Specifically, he argues that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* directly addresses Celsus' attacks on Mary's character by clarifying her social status and virginal state: Mary is thus portrayed, in the *Protevangelium of James*, as a child born to wealthy and respected parents (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1) and her royal descent is confirmed (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4).¹⁹ In addition, her virginity is tested and proven on multiple occasions (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8; 15:13; 20:1); various characters throughout the narrative doubt her virginity, but all are shown to be wrong (*Prot. Jas.* 13:6; 15:10; 19:19). For van Stempvoort, the parallel with Celsus even serves to explain the depiction of Mary as weaving; whereas Celsus dismisses her as a village spinner (*Cels.* 1.28), the *Protevangelium of James* celebrates her as among the virgins called to make a new veil for the Temple.²⁰ Regardless of whether Van Stempvoort is correct in his assertion that the text functioned as an apology for the accusations made by Celsus, the *Protevangelium of James* clearly reflects participation in the discussion amongst early Christians surrounding the nature of Mary's virginity, her relationship to Joseph, Jesus' brothers, etc.

Van Stempvoort proposes a *terminus ad quem* of 204 CE for the text, based on parallels that he sees with Hippolytus' homily on Susanna, which is incorporated in his commentary on the Book of Daniel (LXX Dan 10).²¹ Van Stempvoort not only sees a literary relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and Hippolytus' homily on Susanna whereby the former is dependent upon the latter, but also notes a concurrence in their themes; in his view, Hippolytus' characterization of Susanna displays remarkable parallels to the portrayals of both Anna and Mary in the

¹⁸ Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–32. On similar traditions in later Jewish writings, see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. the first chapter entitled “Jesus’ Family” where Schäfer explores rabbinic parallels to the attacks made on Mary and Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud. *b. Shab* 104b and *b. Sanh* 67a describe in a distorted manner the Gospel stories of Jesus’ family background and parents. Unconcerned about Jesus’ actual identity (whom they refer to as “Ben Stada” or “Ben Pandera”), the sages discuss why this certain person is known by two different names. The answer is, of course, presupposed: his mother Miriam had both a husband (“Stada”) and a lover (“Pandera”).

¹⁹ Van Stempvoort, “The *Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 413–15.

²⁰ Van Stempvoort, “The *Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 413–15. For Celsus’s dismissal of Mary as a village spinner, see Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–28.

²¹ Van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 413–15; for Hippolytus’ homily on Susanna, see Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyter’s Commentary on Daniel* (SCHT; Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 80–86 on Susanna.

Protevangelium of James.²² Van Stempvoort argues that Hippolytus’ homily, as well as the multitude of liturgy and iconography devoted to Susanna, attests to her popularity among Christians in the first years of the third century,²³ suggesting that this regard provides an explanation for the parallels between Susanna and the characters of Mary and Anna. Moreover, van Stempvoort also proposes that the *Protevangelium of James*’ literary borrowings from Susanna extended to patriarchal and matriarchal figures found in novelistic literature such as *Tobit*, *Judith*, and *Esther*.

Although van Stempvoort’s investigation into the date of the *Protevangelium of James* has brought to light a number of important sources and issues, his attempt at narrowing to a precise date may be too ambitious. Ronald F. Hock, for instance, notes that van Stempvoort’s arguments are based on his assumption that the text is apologetic in aim and orientation and that its sole purpose is to respond directly to Celsus’ attacks on Mary.²⁴ While the *Protevangelium of James* may address some of these issues in the course of its narrative development and clearly seems to be in conversation with early discussions on the status of Mary, to limit the text’s function in this manner dismisses crucial elements that are arguably more central to the work itself.

Another recent attempt at dating the *Protevangelium of James* has been pursued by George Zervos.²⁵ He proposes an earlier date of the text in its present redacted form, based on his argument that Justin Martyr was dependent upon the *Protevangelium of James*. In his study, Zervos takes up de Émile Strycker’s suggestion that the text should be dated to the second half of the second century. In his influential book *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, de Strycker investigated parallels with the writings of Justin Martyr, but dismissed the possibility of a direct par-

²² For instance, van Stempvoort notes that parts of sentences found in the Susanna homily are directly replicated in the *Protevangelium of James*: ἡνίκακειπ πλούσιος σφόδρα directly parallels Susanna 4. Other parallels he suggests include: Anna and Susanna both have maid-servants; the structure of Susanna’s and Joseph’s dilemmas are similar in formula and style; they share the common theme of initially being offended, but then later vindicated. See van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 413–15.

²³ For other linguistic, structural, and thematic parallels between the *Protevangelium of James* and these three popular Second Temple Jewish narratives, see van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 413–15.

²⁴ See Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12. In his dating of the *Protevangelium of James*, George Zervos also does not accept van Stempvoort’s attempt to associate the *terminus ad quem* with Hippolytus; “Dating the *Protevangelium of James*: The Justin Martyr Connection,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 415–34.

²⁵ Zervos, “Dating the *Protevangelium of James*,” 415–34.

allel.²⁶ Zervos, however, re-evaluates the four possible points of concordance outlined by de Strycker and proposes that Justin and the *Protevangelium of James* stand in a relationship of literary dependency.²⁷ De Strycker's four proposed concordances are as follows:

- (I) Both *Prot. Jas.* XI, 3 and *1 Apol.* 33, 5 join Matt 1:21 to the end of Luke 1:35 (κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ), where both replace θεοῦ with υἱόστου;
- (II) Both *Prot. Jas.* XI, 2 and *1 Apol.* 33, 6 identify the λόγος with the πνεῦμα ἄγιον and δύναμις υἱόστου of Luke 1:35;
- (III) Both *Prot. Jas.* XII, 2 and *Dial.* 100, 5 contain the words χαράν λαβόυσα;
- (IV) Both *Prot. Jas.* XVIII, 1 and *Dial.* 78, 5 contain the aching of the birth of Jesus in a cave outside Bethlehem.²⁸

Even if we accept that these parallels are close enough to warrant a theory of direct literary dependence, it remains unclear how these sources could be connected. De Strycker and Jose de Aldama conclude that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* may have had access to Justin's writings.²⁹ Zervos, however, suspects the opposite. He argues that the parallels found in Justin Martyr's writings can be explained by means of his access to a source of the *Protevangelium of James*. Based on his investigation of the four concordances,³⁰ Zervos proposes that it is possible to posit a third

²⁶ In his 1961 critical edition, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, de Strycker examines four possible concordances between the *Protevangelium of James* and the writings of Justin Martyr and concludes that there was no literary dependency between the two writings, nor a shared source; *La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 414. Specifically, he asserts: "...nous estimons que, de ces rencontres prétendues ou réelles entre les deux auteurs, on ne peut légitimement conclure à une dépendance littéraire ni de l'un à l'égard de l'autre ni des deux à l'égard d'une troisième source." In a later article ("Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques," 353), de Strycker again dates the *Protevangelium of James* to the second half of the second century; this time, however, he proposes that some connection does exist between the writings of Justin Martyr and the author of the *Protevangelium of James* – namely that the *Protevangelium of James* was dependent upon Justin Martyr, having been convinced by Jose de Aldama's argument to this effect ("El *Protevangelo de Santiago* y sus problemas," *EM* 12 [1962]: 126–29).

²⁷ Zervos, "Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 419.

²⁸ Cited from Zervos' discussion of de Strycker's four proposed concordances between the *Protevangelium of James* and Justin Martyr's works ("Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 419). Note, though, that Zervos' citation for the *Protevangelium of James* is based on de Strycker's division of chapters and lines.

²⁹ Zervos, "Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 419–32.

³⁰ See especially Zervos' arguments put forth for the second and fourth concordances. He maintains that in both cases, there is indication of Justin Martyr's harmonization of the *Protevangelium of James* and other gospels to which he may have had access; more precisely, Zervos questions Justin Martyr's synthesis of the use of λόγος and its connection

source, which was interpolated by a later redactor into certain sections of the *Protevangelium of James* and which Justin consulted; in other words, Justin's parallels are from an already redacted text of the *Protevangelium of James*. Zervos thus places the *terminus ad quem* for the *Protevangelium of James* at 150–160 CE, the period when Justin was actively writing. He places the *terminus post quem* at 80–90 CE, when the Gospels of Matthew and Luke discuss the virgin birth of Jesus.³¹ Zervos' theory of a hypothetical source is intriguing, but the focus of this study will fall mainly on evaluating the *Protevangelium of James* in its present form, rather than its possible pre-history.

In past scholarship on the dating of the *Protevangelium of James*, the emphasis has been limited mainly to select details of the text and to parallels found within Patristic literature, while only secondary attention has been paid to non-canonical writings, like the *Odes of Solomon* and *Ascension of Isaiah*. Moreover, for the most part, the dating debate has been based on a limited handful of details from the *Protevangelium of James*, abstracted from their narrative context for the sake of comparison with references to Mary in Patristic writings. Although the Patristic parallels are important to consider, it may be valuable to approach the dating issue from a fresh perspective.

In the course of my analysis of the theme of purity in the *Protevangelium of James*, I hope to shed light on the question of its date. My concern and approach to dating the text entails first pursuing a literary analysis in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, whereby I will determine what concerns are central to the text itself. In the course of this literary analysis, moreover, I hope to highlight its parallels with early Jewish and Christian writings (e.g., Mishnah; *Didascalia Apostolorum*) that have yet to be brought into the dating discussion. Only then will I return to the question of date, "testing" the various theories outlined above in Chapter Five.

with the annunciation, the cave, and its relationship to the nativity of Christ ("Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 419–32).

³¹ Zervos, "Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 415–34. See also *idem*, "An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 664–91, whereby Zervos argues that the *Protevangelium of James* was composed from an original pre-existing document, generally known as the *Genesis Marias*; and *idem*, "Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth: Have we Found the Missing Link?," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 107–20, wherein he argues for the influence of the *Genesis Marias* sections of the *Protevangelium of James* as an earlier document on the Marian section in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 11.

B. Debates about Provenance

Although the *Protevangelium of James*' date and history of transmission are notoriously complex, perhaps its provenance poses the most difficulty for scholars. Early investigations into the text resulted in a consensus among scholars that Palestine should be dismissed as a possible area of origin because of the author's ignorance of Palestinian geography³² and his apparent lack of awareness of Jewish customs.³³ De Strycker, for instance, noted the author's confusion about the distance between Jerusalem, Judaea, and Bethlehem,³⁴ especially in relation to the tales of Mary's and Joseph's travels between these locales.³⁵ De Strycker thus posits Egypt as a likely place of origin. He bases his argument on the author's use of modest Greek and his incorporation of Coptic elements in his writing.³⁶ De Strycker's other main argument is based on the author's descriptions of the mountains and wilderness in the text.³⁷ In light of the alleged confusion between the

³² J. Quasten was one of the first to argue that the author is not from Palestine based on the text's "astonishing ignorance of Palestinian geography"; see *Patrology: The Beginning of Patristic Literature*, vol. 1 (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1950), 121. So too W. Michaelis, *Die Apokryphen Schriften zum Neuen Testament* (2d ed.; Benmen: Carl Schünemann, 1958), 71; Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 423–24; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 49; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12–13. Some scholars reject Palestine as a possible locale in order to argue for other areas as more likely contenders; e.g., de Strycker, "Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques," 353 and Cothenet, "Protévangile de Jacques," 4267 for Egypt. Though H.R. Smid objects to de Strycker's reasons for dismissing Palestine as the place of the work's origin (see n. 35 below), he concludes for different reasons that "we must assume that the author did not live in Palestine and did not know the country personally" (*Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* [ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965], 22). As noted below, Smid suggests Syria as a possible place of origin, even though he acknowledges problems with this hypothesis as well.

³³ See below for a discussion of the *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism.

³⁴ On the possibility of interpreting Jerusalem as being distinct from Judea, see below.

³⁵ For instance, de Strycker argues that the desert is located in close proximity to the gates of Jerusalem as evident in the fact that Joachim is able to return immediately to the city after having spent time in the desert after his rebuke (*Prot. Jas.* 4:4–5); that the mountains and desert seem to be identical in the narrative; that Joseph and Mary live in Jerusalem, though the census decreed by Augustus concerns Bethlehem alone (*Prot. Jas.* 17:1); and that Jerusalem, Judea and Bethlehem are used simply as indications in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1–12); *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, esp. 419–21.

³⁶ Hock, in accordance with de Strycker, suggests that the Greek mainland, islands, and the cities of western Asia Minor should also be dismissed based on the simple Greek vocabulary and syntax of the text; *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12. In his study of the Greek manuscript tradition, however, Daniels argues that the Greek is, in fact, more sophisticated than usually assumed; "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 13.

³⁷ De Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 419–21.

mountain and desert in *Prot. Jas.* 22:5–7, as well as the description of the desert as being near the gates of Jerusalem in *Prot. Jas.* 4:4–5, he argues that the author was most likely an Egyptian ignorant of Palestinian geography. In support of de Strycker, É. Cothenet cites Patristic parallels, proposing that "La connaissance de l'oeuvre par Clément d'Alexandrie et par Origène plaide en faveur de l'Egypte comme lieu d'origine."³⁸

H.R. Smid, however, challenges de Strycker's view of the mountains and wilderness of the *Protevangelium of James* as reflecting a distinctively Egyptian geography.³⁹ He follows L. Conrady in proposing Syria, specifically Antioch, as the locale in which the text originated.⁴⁰ Smid bases his suggestion on the use of the term δαφνίδεα in *Prot. Jas.* 2:8 – a reference to laurel trees, which were very common in Syria. Syria was famous for its gardens and laurel trees; perhaps, as Smid posits, the author had this fact in mind while composing Anna's lament in the garden in *Prot. Jas.* 2:7–8, though he admits that the evidence is not conclusive.⁴¹

Similarly, Ron Cameron suggests Syria as the most plausible location based on the text's harmonization of Gospel traditions, inasmuch as such harmonies flourished in this region.⁴² In further support of Syria, J.K. Elliott and Zervos note the similar nativity accounts of the *Protevangelium of James* and *Ascension of Isaiah* (11),⁴³ the latter of which was written in the

³⁸ Cothenet, "Protévangile de Jacques," 4267.

³⁹ Smid grounds his challenge in the fact that Syria and Palestine also have identical mountains and deserts; *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 20–21.

⁴⁰ L. Conrady argues in favour of Syria as well in "Das Protevangelium Jacobi in neuer Beleuchtung," *TSK* 62 (1889): 728–83.

⁴¹ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 175.

⁴² Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108–9. Though Cameron favours Syria as the place of origin, he also does not dismiss Asia Minor, Rome, or even Egypt as possibilities and makes note that the gospel harmony of Matthew and Luke which was used by Justin Martyr was done so when he was active in Rome. In Chapter Five I discuss the possibility that the *Protevangelium of James* may have been influenced by gospel harmonies, perhaps not unlike the one shared by Justin Martyr and his student Tatian. On whether Justin and Tatian knew, used, or shared the same harmonized text, see William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1–29 and idem, "Tatian the Assyrian," in *Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics"* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; VCSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125–58.

⁴³ The similarities between the two nativity accounts include the absence of a midwife in the nativity (*Prot. Jas.* 19:12–16 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:14) and Mary's *virginitas post partum* (*Prot. Jas.* 20:1–3 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:10). Elliott acknowledges the commonalities between the texts, but admits that dependence of one upon the other is difficult to prove and that the only suggestion that can be made is a common provenance, namely, Syrian; *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49. Zervos, however, notes several other similarities between the narratives; for example, the mention of Mary being of Davidic descent (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:2); the reference to Joseph as a carpenter, which is not a par-

early second century.⁴⁴ Like the *Protevangelium of James*, Ignatius' *Letter to the Ephesians* (19) and *Odes of Solomon* (19) also seem to acknowledge Mary's virginity *in partu*.⁴⁵ Elliott and Zervos argue that these parallels support a Syrian provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*.⁴⁶

particularly Matthean concept (*Prot. Jas.* 9:1 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:2); and the reference to "portions" or lots (*Prot. Jas.* 9:7 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:3) and argues for the *Protevangelium of James/Genesis Marias* (according to Zervos, the *Protevangelium of James* was composed from an original pre-existing document called the *Genesis Marias*) as an earlier document that may have influenced the Marian section in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 11 ("Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth," 107–20). See also, Enrico Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus* (CCSA 8; Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), the abridged version of said work in *Ascension du prophète Isaïe. Traduction, introduction et notes* (Apocryphes Collection de poche de l'AELAC 2; Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), and the companion to his commentary, *L'Ascensione di Isaia: Studi su un apocrifo al crocifisso dei cristianesimi* (ONS 1; Bologna: EDB, 1994), where he argues that the nativity scene in *Ascen. Isa.* is independent from the gospel of Matthew. Critical editions (texts and translations) with introductions of the *Ascen. Isa.* in Ethiopic, Greek, Coptic, Latin, Old Bulgarian, and the Greek Legend of Isaiah can be found in the earlier volume of the CCSA work; Paolo Bettoli, Alda Giambelluca Kossova, Claudio Leonardi, Enrico Norelli, Lorenzo Perrone, eds., *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus* (CCSA 7; Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

⁴⁴ An Alexandrian provenance has been suggested for the *Ascension of Isaiah*, (e.g., C.D.G. Müller, "The Ascension of Isaiah," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 2 [ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 604), but the general consensus for the work is Syria. See Jonathan Knight who argues that the "use of Isaiah traditions, the description of heavenly ascension in chs. 6–11, the reference to Tyre and Sidon in 5:13, and the possibility that the Isaiah traditions once circulated in Hebrew (mentioned by M.A. Knibb 1985: 146–47) all point to an origin in the Syro-Palestine area. The work testifies to the history of Christianity in that region in the period after the martyrdom of Ignatius"; *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 23.

⁴⁵ Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49, and Zervos, "Annunciation Story," 687–88. Although in Ignatius' letter *To the Ephesians* (19.1) Mary's *Virginitas in Partu* is only implied: "The virginity of Mary and her giving birth eluded the ruler of this age, likewise also the death of the Lord – three mysteries of a cry which were done in the stillness of God" (translation is from William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* [ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 87), the *Odes of Solomon* (19) offers a striking parallel to both the *Ascension of Isaiah* (11) and the *Protevangelium of James*. For instance, all three propose that Mary did not suffer pain and had no need of a midwife. See Darrell D. Hannah, "The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity," *VC* 53.2 (1999): 184. So also Plumpe, "Some Little-Known Early Witnesses," 567–77, esp. 574, whereby he examines the four aforementioned texts (i.e., *Protevangelium of James*, *Ascension of Isaiah* (11), Ignatius' *letter to the Ephesians* (19), and the *Odes of Solomon* (19) and adds a fifth witness: Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (54)). In this work, Plumpe sees an unmistakable allusion to *virginity in partu* in Irenaeus' interpretation of the prophetic words of Isaiah 7:14, "A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son" and "Before she that travailed gave birth, she escaped and was delivered of a man-child" cited at another place according to Irenaeus. Plumpe argues that Irenaeus understood this verse as messi-

By contrast, in a 1981 article, Malcolm Lowe questions the traditional dismissal of Palestine as a possible provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*, a position based on the text's alleged ignorance of Palestinian geography. In his examination of the use of *louδαίος*, Lowe suggests that the unusual statement made by Joseph concerning his being "in," "near," or "around" Bethlehem, but preparing to *έξελθεῖν ἐν τῇ louδαίο*, "depart for Judea" or "go into Judea," (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1) could simply be attributed to the author's mistaken imitation of John 3:22 (i.e., where Jesus is depicted going into Judaea from Jerusalem).⁴⁷ Lowe also cites passages from early Jewish writings, including numerous examples in the book of Ezra (e.g., Ezra 1:2, 1:3, 2:1, etc.) and the Mishnah (e.g., *m. Ket* 4.12), which imply that Jerusalem could be regarded as being distinct, in some fashion, from Judaea.⁴⁸ Countering de Strycker, Lowe also notes that the Judaean desert does indeed start on the eastern slopes of the mountains bordering Jerusalem, if one considers the heavy rain that falls on the western slopes.⁴⁹ In his view, the conflation of mountains and desert does not rule out a Palestinian provenance.

As evident by the various suggestions put forth by scholars, locating the *Protevangelium of James*' place of origin has been a difficult and troubling task. In the past, arguments advanced for one locale over another have depended mainly upon geographical and environmental details (i.e., mountains, trees, and desert).⁵⁰ In addition, discussions about the provenance of the text are sometimes based on the problematic assumption that knowledge of "Jewish tradition" would automatically imply a Palestinian provenance, while lack of such knowledge would necessitate a different setting. This is particularly true if one considers that pilgrimages to Jerusalem (especially during Passover) were extremely popular by diasporic Jews,⁵¹ and that after the second Jewish revolt against Rome in 135 CE the

anic and that it spoke of the Virgin Mary who gave birth to the Christ-child in a manner unparalleled by others; that is without birth pangs or injury to her physical body, i.e., "she escaped." And also Buck, "Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary," 371–99, esp. 379; and my discussion in Chapter Five.

⁴⁶ Zervos, "Annunciation Story," 687–88 and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49.

⁴⁷ Malcolm Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha: A Fresh Approach to the Gospels of James, Pseudo-Thomas, Peter and Nicodemus," *NovT* 23.1 (1981): 62 n. 24.

⁴⁸ Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha," 62 n. 24.

⁴⁹ Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha," 62 n. 24.

⁵⁰ See above on the arguments put forth by de Strycker, Cothenet, Smid, Hock, Cameron, Elliott, Zervos, etc.

⁵¹ Josephus relates that many riots against the Roman government erupted during festivals when large pilgrimages took place not least because tens of thousands of Jews from the Diaspora converged in Jerusalem. Based on his calculation, Josephus reports approximately three million participants in Jerusalem during Passover based on the ten person quota per sacrifice (on these calculations see Josephus, *B.J.* 6.423–26 and *t. Pesah.* 5).

Jews were forced out of Jerusalem. In the former case, knowledge of Palestinian geography and traditions would be accessible both to Jews living in the diaspora and to non-Jews living in Jerusalem. In the latter case, knowledge of Palestinian geography would be limited to non-Jews living in Jerusalem or a “remembered knowledge” by Jews living in the diaspora.

I propose, however, that the question of provenance may perhaps be better addressed after a more detailed examination of the text itself, whereby special consideration of its concerns and interests may shed light on its geographical origins. In particular, a careful re-examination of the nature of the *Protevangelium of James*’ connections with Jewish traditions, specifically those of which the author(s) may or may not have been aware, as well as a look at the possible spread and transmission of such traditions, even beyond Palestine, will contribute to the discussion of the text’s provenance.

C. The Protevangelium of James and Judaism

As clear from the above survey, the scholarly debate about the provenance of the *Protevangelium of James* is closely related to the debate concerning its connections to Judaism. We have already discussed some cases in which scholars propose the author’s lack of knowledge about Judaism, albeit mainly based on a purported lack of knowledge of Palestinian geography (see further below).

By contrast, van Stempvoort, Cameron, and Smid assume a relationship between the author and Judaism and/or “Jewish-Christianity” based on the text’s extensive use of the Septuagint.⁵² Above, we noted that the charac-

For the feast of Pentecost, Josephus reports that a countless number of pilgrims came from Galilee, Edom, Jericho, and the Transjordan (B.J. 2.43). While it is difficult to determine precisely how many pilgrims came to Jerusalem for festivals, S. Safrai writes that pilgrimages made Jerusalem the center of Jewish life for the Jews in the first century and that “it is certain that thousands from the Land of Israel and from the Diaspora did go up to Jerusalem and that it is probably safe to assume that there was hardly a community in Palestine or the Diaspora from which some members did not go up, either in large or small numbers”; “The Temple,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions, Volume 2* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern with D. Flusser and W.C. van Unnik; CRINT Section 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976), 899–902.

⁵² Van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 415–19; Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, esp. 9–12. Other scholars who have also noted the milieu for the text include: Pratscher, *Herrenbruder Jakobus*, 224; Cullmann, “Protevan-

ters of Anna and Joachim in the *Protevangelium of James* seem to be patterned on Sarah and Abraham in Gen 18, 20–21 and, perhaps even more closely, on Hannah and Elkannah in 1 Sam 1–2. Van Stempvoort has further argued that biblical matriarchs provided the model for the *Protevangelium of James*’ portrait of Mary.⁵³ In addition, Hellenistic Jewish sources such as Susanna (Dan 13:1–64), Tobit, and Judith also share many similarities with the *Protevangelium of James*.⁵⁴ These similarities, van Stempvoort stresses, are not only based on tone and thought, but also on language, usage, and motifs.⁵⁵ Cameron makes a similar argument with appeal to the author’s style. He writes, “The entirety of the *Protevangelium of James* is steeped in the language of the Septuagint ... Not only are individual words, phrases, and whole paragraphs reminiscent of the Septuagint; such discrete forms as the hymn and the lament of Anna also display conscious, direct ‘remembrance’ of the stories recorded in the scriptures.”⁵⁶ Both van Stempvoort and Cameron address the important parallels between the *Protevangelium of James* and the LXX in order to suggest a Jewish background, but neither attempt to explore this connection beyond the LXX.

Similarly, for Smid, the possibility of a Jewish background for the *Protevangelium of James* is strengthened by its literary dependence on the Septuagint.⁵⁷ Smid, like Cameron, reads the *Protevangelium of James* as couched in biblical thought and language (i.e., identical or similar vocabulary and usage of words and phrases), with the LXX as its primary source.⁵⁸ As noted above, Smid further shows all instances where a word in the *Protevangelium of James* is used in the same manner in the LXX; he points, in particular, to the text’s use of unusual phrases such as η̄ ημέρα κυρίου η̄ μεγάλη (*Prot. Jas.* 1:4), the understanding and use of the πέταλον by the high priest (*Prot. Jas.* 5:1), and the reference to the drinking of bitter water test by Joseph and Mary to verify their innocence.⁵⁹ These language choices lead Smid to propose that the author was either of Jewish descent, born after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, or was, at the very least, someone who was strongly influenced by biblical

geliem of James,” 423–24; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 21–25.

⁵³ Van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 415–19; so too Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 11.

⁵⁴ Parallels with so-called “OT pseudepigrapha,” such as *Joseph and Aseneth*, are noted above in the Introduction.

⁵⁵ Van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 415–19.

⁵⁶ Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108.

⁵⁷ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 9–12.

⁵⁸ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 9–12.

⁵⁹ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 21.

tales in the LXX and/or acquired a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.

Ironically, though Smid criticizes de Strycker for not questioning the issue of whether or not “the author was of Jewish or pagan descent,”⁶⁰ Smid himself does not address the text’s connection with Judaism apart from its dependence on the LXX and the author’s knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. Problematic, in my opinion, is the view of “Judaism” assumed here, which is simply a concern for the Hebrew Bible – an interest arguably shared by most followers of Jesus in the first centuries of the Common Era.

W.S. Vorster’s 1986 article on the annunciation in the *Protevangelium of James* may open the way for a more nuanced approach to the question of its relationship to Judaism, since he focuses on the representations of Jews within the text itself. He argues that Jewish leaders are portrayed in a surprisingly positive light, unlike the characterization given to them by the NT Gospels. He notes that the religious leaders “perform religious rites (cf. 6:2, 8:2, 3, 24:1 et al.), bless (17:3 et al.), pray (8:3 et al.), take care of the temple and determine the norms (cf. 10:1, 15:3 et al.)... They seek the will of God in prayer and reveal it (8:3ff).”⁶¹ According to Vorster, the Jewish characters in the *Protevangelium of James* are helpers and, therefore, not opponents of the protagonists. Even when the Jewish leaders demand Joseph and Mary take the bitter water test in *Prot. Jas.* 16:3, the outcome is positive: Mary is deemed pure and Joseph’s innocence is maintained. This favourable portrayal of Jewish leaders, Vorster proposes, may suggest a story written with Jewish interests in mind. As “the child [Jesus] is born from Israel for Israel,”⁶² Vorster argues that the Jewish religious leaders can be convincingly read as positive cooperators in his coming and may in fact mark a polemical move on the part of the author to address views held by Jews who were his contemporaries.⁶³

Similarly, Lowe examines the *Protevangelium of James*’ use of the term *Ιουδαῖος*. Based on his analysis of early Jewish writings, he concludes that the term’s primary meaning is geographical, referring most often to the inhabitants of *ἡ Ιουδαία*, (i.e., Judaeans). He concludes that *Ιουδαῖος* seems to have been applied to all Jews by those living *outside* Palestine. By contrast, there was still a distinction made by the Jews who lived *inside* Palestine, who called themselves “Israel,” but tended to refer

⁶⁰ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 21.

⁶¹ W.S. Vorster, “The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus in the *Protevangelium of James*,” in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament* (ed. J. Petzer and P. Hartin; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 41.

⁶² Vorster, “Annunciation of the Birth,” 41.

⁶³ This presentation of Jewish religious leaders participating positively in the coming of the child will be brought even more to light in my own inquiry on the role of the Jewish priests and Temple as it pertains to Mary’s depiction in Chapter Two.

to the inhabitants of the Jerusalem region as “Judeans.”⁶⁴ That the *Protevangelium of James* adopts this “insider language” has led Lowe to suspect a Jewish author.⁶⁵

In contrast, Oscar Cullmann and Elliott both maintain that the content of the *Protevangelium of James* does not point us to a Jewish or “Jewish-Christian” origin, but rather to authorship by a non-Jew. Their arguments are much the same as have been advanced against a Palestinian provenance; they base their assertion on the author’s “ignorance of the geography of Palestine and of Jewish customs.”⁶⁶ Examples of the latter offered by Cullmann and Elliott include the rejection of Joachim’s gift to the Lord because of his childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5); Mary’s stay and upbringing in the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:1–9:10); and Joseph’s travels from Bethlehem to Judea (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1).⁶⁷ Elliott argues further that certain details seemingly Jewish at first sight, such as the bitter water conviction (*Prot. Jas.* 16:3), in fact, on a closer look, betray a misunderstanding of actual Jewish customs, namely because the accounts of the bitter water test in the Hebrew Bible do not correspond to the events detailed in the *Protevangelium of James*.⁶⁸ As the depiction of the bitter water test is often cited as the strongest evidence against the Jewishness of the *Protevangelium of James*, it is noteworthy that Elliott’s assessment may be questioned on the same grounds as theories based on the text’s use of the LXX, namely, as viewing “Judaism” as consisting only of the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁹

Similarly, Michael Mach strongly opposes the idea that the *Protevangelium of James* attests any Jewish or “Jewish-Christian” elements. Upon analyzing the linguistic and *halakhic* motifs, he determines that there is no connection between the *Protevangelium of James* and Jewish traditions and customs of any sort and that the text also “lacks any evidence for char-

⁶⁴ Lowe, “ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha,” 56.

⁶⁵ Lowe, “ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha,” 70.

⁶⁶ Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49 and Cullmann, “*Protevangelium of James*,” 423–24.

⁶⁷ See esp. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49 and Cullmann, “*Protevangelium of James*,” 424.

⁶⁸ According to the Pentateuch (i.e., Num 5:11–31), the bitter water test was given only to the wife suspected of betraying her husband. In the *Protevangelium of James*, the bitter water is given both to Mary and Joseph to test whether they have committed a sin. For a literary investigation into the nature of the trial and the punishment of the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah: Numbers 5:11–31,” *VT* 34.1 (1984): 11–26.

⁶⁹ Timothy Horner has shown, however, that the bitter water test taken by Joseph and Mary may be closer to other forms of Judaism, namely, to the spirit of the mishnaic teaching of *Sotah*; “Jewish Aspects of the *Protevangelium of James*,” *JECS* 12.3 (2004): 314 (see further discussion below).

acteristic Jewish-Christian beliefs.⁷⁰ Mach, for instance, dismisses the idea that the author had any knowledge of Hebrew; he points to phrases that, on first glance, seem to be etymological wordplays, but that are, in his reading, simply expressions taken from the NT or LXX. Mach furthers his argument by examining passages that seem to show an interest in Jewish *halakhah*. For instance, he looks at the details concerning the high priest's decision to make a new veil for the temple in *Prot. Jas.* 10:1. Some scholars, such as S. Lieberman and F. Manns,⁷¹ maintain that this detail is influenced by *halakhic* formulations, stressing that Mary is remembered and chosen to weave the veil because of her virginity and state of purity.⁷² By contrast, Mach argues that the emphasis on virginity and ritual purity required of those working in the Temple was not limited to the Jerusalem Temple alone; these requirements also held for the creation of the *peplos* for the Greek goddesses Athena and Hera in their temples in Athens and thus cannot be read as a Jewish characteristic.⁷³ Therefore, in Mach's view, no connections can be made to Judaism on the basis of the purity required for Temple weavers in *Prot. Jas.* 10:1–4.⁷⁴

Especially in light of Vorster's insights into the text's presentation of Jews and Lowe's suggestion of its use of "insider" Jewish language, we might question Mach's complete rejection of the relevance of Jewish traditions for understanding the text. We also might ask whether the rejection of Jewish elements in the *Protevangelium of James* needs to be re-evaluated in light of recent research on the early formation and fluidity of Jewish and Christian identities in the late Roman period.⁷⁵ Again the problematic issue concerning the *Protevangelium of James*' connection with Judaism is the assumption made by past scholarship about what constitutes Jewish features in the text. In light of the complexity in defining Jewish

⁷⁰ Michael Mach acknowledges that there are two instances when the *Protevangelium of James* comes close to betraying a knowledge of Jewish traditions – namely in the traditions about Adam (*Prot. Jas.* 13:5) and Zechariah (*Prot. Jas.* 23–24). He attributes both, however, to later redactional activity; "Are There Jewish Elements in the 'Protevangelium Jacobi'?", in *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 220.

⁷¹ S. Lieberman and F. Manns, "Une Ancienne Tradition sur la Jeunesse de Marie" in *Essais sur le Judeo-Christianisme* (AnBib 12; Jerusalem: Analecta, 1977), 106–14.

⁷² Mach, "Are There Jewish Elements," 220 n. 3.

⁷³ Mach, "Are There Jewish Elements," 216–17.

⁷⁴ Mach, "Are There Jewish Elements," 216–17.

⁷⁵ E.g., Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); the contributions in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Jörg Frey, ed., *Jewish Identities in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

identity in the first centuries of the Common Era, can knowledge of Palestinian geography and Hebrew language, interest in the LXX, and details concerning the accuracy and knowledge of the Temple stand as the only criteria by which to determine Jewish or non-Jewish origin? In my view, the assumption that Judaism consists simply of a concern for the Hebrew Bible is tenuous, especially given our knowledge of the various "Judaisms" that existed in and around the period when the text was first written.⁷⁶

More promising, in my view, is the comparison with early rabbinic traditions. In a 1988 article, Cothenet argues for a Jewish milieu for the *Protevangelium of James* based on what he views as a focus on Jewish scriptures and stories and parallels with rabbinic traditions (e.g., the interpretation of Eve's error by Joseph at 13:5, cf. Targum Ps-Jonathan on Gen 4:1);⁷⁷ he suggests that the text can be understood as one of the "premier midrash chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie."⁷⁸ With regard to the *Protevangelium of James*, Cothenet determines that the "auteur dépend surtout d'un

⁷⁶ For a good introduction to the diversity of "Judaisms" being practiced during the Second Temple Period (515 BCE–70 CE) see James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); also see W.S. Green, "Introduction: The Scholarly Study of Judaism and its Sources," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity. I. The Literary and Archaeological Sources* (ed. Jacob Neusner; HO 1; Nomo 16; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–5 and idem, "Ancient Judaisms: Contours and Complexity," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible* (ed. S.E. Balentine and J. Barton; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 295–97. There are ample sources that attest to the varying Jewish groups, movements, communities, and interpretations of Scripture living in close proximity, including primary sources ranging from Ezra and Nehemiah to Philo and Josephus to the Dead Sea Scrolls. George Nickelsburg provides an excellent source book to the intertestamental literature attesting to these diverse Jewish groups, movements and communities in his *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005); also Lawrence Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, N.J.: KTav, 1998); idem *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994) and David Flusser, *Judaism and the Second Temple Period: Qumran and Apocalypticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) for specific work on Qumran.

⁷⁷ Renee Bloch has written significantly on rabbinic traditions concerning Moses, especially in terms of drawing parallels between Midrashic stories on the birth of Moses and the birth story of Jesus in Matthew; e.g., "Quelques Aspects de la Figure de Moïse dans la Tradition Rabbinique," in *Moïse: Homme de l'Alliance* (ed. H. Cazelles, et. al.; Paris: Desclé, 1955), 164–65.

⁷⁸ Cothenet, "Protévangile de Jacques," 4252. Cameron suggests that the *Protevangelium of James* can also be understood as a "midrashic" exegesis based on its usage of other written documents (i.e., the harmonized infancy stories of Matthew and Luke) in recreating the story surrounding the infancy of Jesus; *Other Gospels*, 108.

grand nombre de motifs traditionnels dans la haggada.⁷⁹ Moreover, he insists that it is “ces motifs haggadiques et l’étude de leur transformation revêt la plus grande importance pour fixer l’origine du Protévangile et préciser ses intentions.”⁸⁰

In a 2004 article, Timothy Horner takes a more cautious approach to investigating rabbinic parallels, limiting himself to tannaitic traditions. He begins by suggesting that the rejection of Jewish elements in the *Protevangelium of James* may be the result of understanding the text through the lens of later Christian tradition, which may not necessarily represent the true character of the document.⁸¹ Specifically, Horner attributes this rejection of Jewish elements by past scholars (e.g., Elliott, Hock, Zervos) to the text’s lack of references to elements common to Second Temple Jewish literature.

Horner suggests that there are instances in the *Protevangelium of James* that can be best understood when read against the background of second century Jewish sources, specifically the tannaitic traditions collected within the Mishnah. He proposes that the *Protevangelium of James* can be read as “a document that uses Jewish imagery to address the concerns and criticisms that might have been important to people who understand Christianity within a predominantly Jewish matrix or those who were attempting to reinterpret the Jewish matrix in the light of Christian doctrine.”⁸² In his view, the “Protoevangelium of James would have been best understood – perhaps only fully understood – within a community that was familiar with concerns and images of contemporary Judaism.”⁸³

Significantly for our purposes, the aspects of the text that Horner deems distinctly Jewish include tannaitic traditions concerning childlessness, betrothal, and marriage, on the one hand, and purity and virginity, on the other.⁸⁴ He notes how the *Protevangelium of James* narrativizes Mary’s life in three stages: [1] from her birth to age three, [2] from age three to age twelve, and [3] from age twelve to adulthood. This specific division in age parallels the understanding of the female life-cycle in mishnaic *halakhot* concerning women. In addition, Horner suggests that portions of the *Protevangelium of James* hold significant meaning when read in concert with the Mishnah. For instance, *m. Nid* 5.4 and *m. Ket* 1.2–3 distinguish between a girl of three years and a day or younger, whose virginity is as-

⁷⁹ Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4261.

⁸⁰ Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4262.

⁸¹ Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 316.

⁸² Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 314.

⁸³ Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 317.

⁸⁴ Horner also makes note of a Talmudic critique of the virgin birth. See *b. Pes* 110b–101a, which deals with the problem of affirming two gods; “Jewish Aspects,” 331.

sured, and a girl older than three years and a day, for whom defilement is a possibility (i.e., a *Ketannah*).⁸⁵ In Horner’s view, this understanding of girlhood helps to make sense of the decision by Anna and Joachim, in *Prot. Jas.* 7:2, to dedicate Mary to the Temple at the age of three, despite their initial plan to have her sent at the age of two.

Horner’s exploration of mishnaic parallels to the *Protevangelium of James* also points to the text’s overarching aim of affirming the virginity and purity of Mary. Horner suggests, more specifically, that the text may respond to Jewish critiques surrounding the virgin birth of Jesus (see e.g., Origen, *Cels.* 1.32; *b. Sanh* 67a).⁸⁶ From the combination of its commonalities with the Mishnah and its apparent response to Jewish critiques of Mary’s virginity, he concludes that the *Protevangelium of James* must have been a product of a cultural context marked by proximity to, and concern for, contemporary expressions of Judaism – and rabbinic/proto-rabbinic Judaism in particular.

Admittedly, Horner’s investigation of mishnaic parallels as a way to interpret what he views as a second century piece of literature (i.e., *Protevangelium of James*) is problematic given that the Mishnah is an early third century collection of traditions, but his assessment that the text may be better understood if read in this light may be especially promising considering the way ritual purity is presented in the narrative.⁸⁷ In this study, my concern for the text involves the place and function of purity as it pertains to the depiction of Mary, but also as it relates or is connected to Judaism. In my view, a special focus on ritual purity may allow for an examination of the influence of connections to the Hebrew Bible, on the one hand (e.g., Levitical law), and rabbinic traditions, on the other (e.g., tannaitic traditions about women and purity), thus allowing me to “test” the various theories outlined above about the *Protevangelium of James’* relationship to Judaism. In the process, I hope to build on and extend Horner’s insights concerning the text’s link to Judaism by including analyses of rabbinic traditions formed at approximately the same time.

⁸⁵ On this, see Chapter Three.

⁸⁶ Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 330–32.

⁸⁷ This is especially true given that Horner is clear that his goal is not to establish literary dependency between the *Protevangelium of James* and the Mishnah, but rather to understand the parallels between them as a way to help “deconstruct the assumption that *Prot. Jas.* had nothing to do with Judaism... and may have had more in common with contemporary Judaism, or at least one part of it, than is often assumed”; Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 314. Moreover, literary dependency is not necessary to suggest that the *Protevangelium of James* contains elements that may have been better understood by readers who were familiar with contemporary Jewish teachings.

D. Genre and Purpose

Before turning to an analysis of the depiction of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*, it is also necessary to consider its purpose and literary genre. This issue is tightly tied to the question of its overarching aims. As with its date, provenance, and relationship to Judaism, the question of its genre and purpose has been the subject of much scholarly debate.

Past scholarship generally characterizes the purpose of the work in one of three ways. First is to “fill in” the gaps left by the NT Gospels’ accounts of the life of Mary and birth of Jesus.⁸⁸ Most scholars assume that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* knows the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and sets out to expand and interpret them.⁸⁹ Others point to the production of Infancy Gospels as a parallel;⁹⁰ just as stories were circulating about Jesus concerning his adolescent years to adulthood (e.g., *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*), so too were Christ-believers curious about Mary, her childhood, and the events leading up to her motherhood. By this logic, the *Protevangelium of James* and other Marian apocrypha grew out of a perceived need to provide some form of biography for Mary.⁹¹ Understood in this way, the production of the *Protevangelium of James* can be seen as part of the broader growth of biographical literature in Late Antiquity dedicated to great and famous personalities.⁹²

⁸⁸ E.g., Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 3; Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 414 and 416–18; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 46; and Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. Brian McNeil; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2003), 64.

⁸⁹ Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4260; Vorster, “The Protevangelium of James and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.F.J. Klijn* (ed. T. Baarda et al.; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1988), 268–69, and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 51, to name a few. Noteworthy is the fact that scholars have not seriously explored gospel harmonies (e.g., Tatian’s *Diatessaron*) as a possible source for the *Protevangelium of James*. See my discussion on this topic in Chapter Five.

⁹⁰ E.g., Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 64 and Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 3.

⁹¹ Klauck warns us that though the writing was influenced by biographical literature of Late Antiquity and probably sprung from the need to provide Mary with her own biography, historically reliable information should not be expected from the narrative and that it adds nothing to our knowledge of Jesus’ human origins. For a discussion on reasons why the details provided in the *Protevangelium of James* concerning Mary cannot be regarded as authentic, see his *Apocryphal Gospels*, 64–72.

⁹² For biographies of women in Late Antiquity, see e.g., *Vita Olympiadis* (SC 13bis, 406–49); (Gerontius), *Vita Melaniae Iunioris* (SC 90, 124–271); *Vita Syncleticae* (PG 28, 1488–1557); Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* (SC 178, 136–267). Jerome’s letter to and memorials of women also provide biographical information on women who were respected and praised by the author; see esp. letters 22, 23, 24, 38, 39, 54, 75, 79, 107, 108, 123, 127, 130.

Another possibility, posited by a number of scholars including Hans-Josef Klauck, John L. Allen, Smid, van Stempvoort, Cothenet, Elliott, and Horner,⁹³ is that the writing was motivated, in part and whole, by apologetic aims. As noted above, the text has often been read as a response to Jewish and/or “pagan” polemics against Christian claims, especially with respect to the claim that Jesus was born of a virgin.⁹⁴ Above, we noted van Stempvoort’s theory that the *Protevangelium of James* was written specifically to respond to Celsus, who seems to have mocked the lowly social status of Jesus’ parents, Mary’s need to spin for a living, and the possibility of a virgin birth as well as suggesting that Mary bore a child to a certain soldier name Panthera. In addition, Horner has also pointed to the rabbinic tradition concerning “Yeshu ben Panthera.”⁹⁵ This name is first mentioned in the Tosefta (*t. Hull* 2.22–24) and may be a reference to Jesus. In later rabbinic sources (e.g., *b. Sanh* 106a), we also find a similar reference to an unnamed woman who “was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters.” That the unidentified woman alluded to seems to be Mary, Jesus’ mother, is reinforced by the reference to her “playing the harlot with carpenters.” From her analysis of these rabbinic traditions, Hasan-Rokem proposes that “the story about the Messiah’s birth was thus a common tradition, a theme in which Jews in Palestine, beginning with the first century CE, told stories in several versions.”⁹⁶ If we follow her assessment, we might speculate that the connection between Jesus and Panthera was part of popular oral and/or folkloristic Jewish tradition already in the first century, and that hints about the illegitimacy of Jesus and critique of the virgin birth in later rabbinic writings represent traces of a larger tradition.⁹⁷

For both Smid and Elliott, the polemics initiated by Celsus’ accusations coupled with scandalous versions of Mary’s conception and birth of Jesus in classical rabbinic literature may help explain why the *Protevangelium of*

⁹³ E.g., Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 66; John L. Allen, “The Protevangelium of James as an ‘Historia’: The Insufficiency of the ‘Infancy Gospel’ Category,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 515–17; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 15–17; van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 410; Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4268; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49–50; Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 330.

⁹⁴ See n. 93 above.

⁹⁵ Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 329–30.

⁹⁶ Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (trans. Batya Stein; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 156.

⁹⁷ On this later tradition and its aims, see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 15–24 where he examines the stories in *b. Shab* 104b and *b. Sanh* 67a as rabbinic parallels to the accusations made against Mary and Jesus (Miriam and Ben Stada or Ben Pandera according to the sages).

James depicts Mary's parents as members of high society with royal lineage as well as promotes the view that her spinning confers an honour placed upon her for the sake of the Temple.⁹⁸ More importantly, her status as a virgin is repeatedly confirmed: in the *Protevangelium of James*, her virginity is verified by a number of different witnesses including the angel (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5–8), Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 14:5), the priest and the people of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 16:5–8), the unnamed midwife (*Prot. Jas.* 19:14), and Salome (*Prot. Jas.* 20:1–2, 10). These multiple narrative affirmations may have been meant. Smid and Elliott suggest, as a means of refuting claims that her pregnancy was the result of adultery and that Jesus was not therefore born in any miraculous fashion.⁹⁹

Even if details of the *Protevangelium of James* can be explained as responses to such polemics, does this mean that the overarching aim of the text is apologetic? In contrast to van Stempvoort, Hock and Smid acknowledge the polemically-motivated nature of the work, but also argue that apologetic aims do not suffice to explain the whole narrative.¹⁰⁰ Instead, Hock specifically suggests an encomiastic purpose as primary for the creation of the narrative.¹⁰¹ In his view, even passages that show apologetic elements seem to do so only as a secondary function.¹⁰² With regard to Mary's role as a spinner for the creation of the Temple veil (*Prot. Jas.* 10:7–8), for instance, Hock argues that this detail is employed not simply to refute the claim that she spun for a living, but also as a means to emphasize her special purity and, thus, to praise her character.¹⁰³ Hock examines the Greco-Roman genre of the encomium by looking specifically at teaching manuals such as Hermogenes' *Progymnasmata*; on this basis, he argues that the defining elements of the genre of the encomium are present in the *Protevangelium of James*.

Hermogenes' *Progymnasmata* is a second century teaching manual with instructions and exercises on how to write various types of compositions,

⁹⁸ So also Pratscher, *Herrenbruder Jakobus*, 223; van Stempvoort, "Protevangelium Jacobi," 410; Cothenet, "Protévangile de Jacques," 4268; and Allen, "Protevangelium of James" as an "Historia," 515–17; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49–50.

⁹⁹ Smid, *Protevangelium of Jacobi*, 15–17 and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 15–20 and Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 14–19.

¹⁰¹ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 15.

¹⁰² Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 15.

¹⁰³ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 16 and Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 425. In addition, Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 100–122, who describes Mary as "sacred purity," argues that because Mary's purity so dominates the story, Mary herself becomes the function of that purity rather than the purity being a characteristic of Mary. Finally, Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 141–64, in accordance with Hock, supports his claims for understanding certain details in the narrative as encomiastic in style.

which seems to reflect common Greco-Roman pedagogical practices.¹⁰⁴ The manual defines the encomium as a formal expression of high praise and an exposition of the good qualities of a person or thing and lists the term among the various kinds of compositional exercises learned and practiced by students in antiquity.¹⁰⁵ In his handbook, Hermogenes outlines the components necessary for an encomium composed for a person. His list includes: national origin, family, marvellous occurrences at birth, nurture, upbringing, pursuits, and virtuous deeds of mind and body.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the amplification of the good features of the person being praised by means of comparison is considered the best source for strengthening one's argument in encomia.¹⁰⁷ Hermogenes continues by distinguishing between *encomion*, *hymns*, and *epainos*: "Encomion differs from *epainos* in that *epainos* can be short; for example, 'Socrates is wise,' while encomion is found in a longer passage... the encomia of gods should be called 'hymns.'"¹⁰⁸

Hock demonstrates that the *Protevangelium of James* closely follows the instructions for writing an encomium.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the narrative's opening lines show a concern for demonstrating Mary's national origins by looking to her ethnicity, nationality, ancestors and parents. The references to the "twelve tribes of Israel" (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1) as well as "Israelite children" (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5) immediately identify Mary's ethnicity/nationality. The naming of Joachim and Anna and the author's description of their wealth and political power as well as their piety all provide important information about Mary's parents. Obvious references to Mary's ancestors can be detected in the author's mention of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17), but also in the names chosen for Mary's parents: Anna's name recalls Samuel's mother's name, Hannah, in 1 Sam 1–2 and Joachim's name recalls the story of Susanna (Sus 4).

In addition, the events surrounding Anna's conception of Mary also fit squarely within the category of "marvellous occurrences at birth." Much

¹⁰⁴ For a description and introduction to the *Progymnasmata*, see George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 52–73, esp. 63; idem *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), xiii.

¹⁰⁵ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

¹⁰⁷ Hermogenes also gives instructions on how to discuss such topics by proposing the student look at how long the subject lived and the manner in which s/he died, finishing with an epilogue rather fitting of a prayer. See Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83 and idem, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 205.

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

¹⁰⁹ Especially according to the categories outlined by Hermogenes.

like her foremothers, Anna's conception is not without difficulty because despite Anna's and Joachim's prominent standing and wealth, they suffer from infertility. So when they are given separate, individual signs that God has blessed them with a child – Anna is greeted by an angelic messenger (*Prot. Jas.* 4:1), Joachim receives confirmation via a polished disc (*Prot. Jas.* 5:1) – the circumstances of this pregnancy move from the realm of the ordinary to extraordinary.

Mary's upbringing also receives special focus in the narrative as it relates specifically to the basis of her praise: Mary's purity. From the moment Mary is born, Anna makes special arrangements to ensure her daughter's purity is maintained (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9), which is only heightened during her childhood by monitoring not only Mary's physical environment, but also her actions and interactions with other people (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9–6:5). Thus, Mary's special upbringing results in extraordinary feats: Mary not only stands at six months, but also walks (*Prot. Jas.* 6:1–2). This exceptional upbringing is further enhanced when Mary takes up her home in the Temple of the Lord, is given access to the Holy of Holies, and is even fed by the hands of heavenly angels (*Prot. Jas.* 7:6–7; 7:9; 8:2). Mary lives, eats, and plays only among the pure.

Finally, the last two important conventions for an encomium concern the subject's virtuous deeds¹¹⁰ and the use of comparisons to further enhance the character of the one being praised.¹¹¹ Mary's virtuous deeds are demonstrated in what Hock describes as her “σωφροσύνη” or “self-control,” especially in the context of her sexual purity,¹¹² which is consistently maintained despite the disbelief and questioning of others (e.g., Joseph, priests, and people of Israel; *Prot. Jas.* 13:6–8; 15:12; 20:1). Also, the coupling of Elizabeth and Zechariah functions as a positive comparison for Mary and Joseph. In Luke's narrative, many modern scholars have noted a step parallelism between Jesus and John, whereby the outcome reveals that Jesus is understood as being superior to John.¹¹³ In the *Protevangelium of James*, a similar parallelism is evident, involving more than one additional character to further highlight Mary's virtuous qualities. For instance, Zechariah's bravery to keep secret the whereabouts of his son in the face of Herod's threats and his ultimate martyrdom (*Prot. Jas.* 23:1–3) and Elizabeth's courage to escape to the mountains with her son John (*Prot.*

¹¹⁰ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

¹¹¹ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

¹¹² Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 19.

¹¹³ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 282–85 and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 372–90 for a discussion on this “step parallelism” between Jesus and John the Baptist.

Jas. 22:5) serve to enhance Mary's courage and bravery when she is forced to protect her son from the dangers of Herod's wrath (*Prot. Jas.* 22:3–4).

One difficulty that arises with understanding the *Protevangelium of James* as an encomium is the author's self-proclamation of the work as a *historia* or history (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1; 25:1; 25:3). In reaction to the author's claim, Hock suggests that the work is not an encomium as envisioned in the *Progymnasmata*, but rather a *historia* of a specific kind, namely, a διήγημα ιστορικόν or “historical narrative.”¹¹⁴ Hock further suggests that during the development of the genre, historical narratives evolved in a way that encouraged and allowed for an encomiastic point of view. In his view, this development occurred precisely during the time period when the *Protevangelium of James* was being written and may have influenced the structure and purpose of the work.¹¹⁵ In other words, though the author uses the term *historia* to describe the work, his literary practice is shaped by the genre and aims of the encomium, as they are described in rhetorical handbooks; thus, his writing does not make the conventions of an encomium irrelevant.¹¹⁶

Admittedly, while it is problematic to solely categorize the *Protevangelium of James* as an encomium¹¹⁷ since its content spans multiple genre boundaries and serves various purposes, it is worth investigating in what ways its adoption of elements in line with the literary genre of the encomium might shed further light on the purpose of the text.¹¹⁸ For instance, the *Protevangelium of James*' other aims – such as the impulse to expand on gospel traditions about Mary's life and the desire to answer anti-Christian polemics – may be further and more deeply understood in relation to the purpose of praising Mary.

E. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have limited our survey of past scholarship to the date, provenance, and genre of the *Protevangelium of James* as well as its relation to Judaism. As for its possible date, although a broad range of dates have been suggested from the mid-second century to as late as the fifth

¹¹⁴ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 17.

¹¹⁶ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 17.

¹¹⁷ While helpful, Hock's study is limited in that his survey does not examine the theme of Mary's purity beyond the observation that the text makes great efforts to elevate this characteristic and to maintain her virginity in the face of disbelief and adversity; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 18–19.

¹¹⁸ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 41.

century, the general consensus is that it is probably a product of the late second or early third century.¹¹⁹ In respect to the narrative's provenance, three general areas have been proposed, based mainly on geographical details extracted from the text: Interior Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria.¹²⁰ Interconnected with the debate regarding its provenance is scholarly interest in the *Protevangelium of James*' connection to Judaism. As we have seen, arguments have been advanced both for and against Jewish influence and knowledge. We have also explored the text's literary genre, focusing on Hock's suggestion that it may stand in a close relationship to the Greco-Roman genre of the encomium.

In what follows, I hope to expand and contribute to the discussion concerning the text's provenance and relationship to Judaism and give credibility to a late second or early third century date, specifically by using a literary approach to examine the theme of purity. By focusing on the characterization of Mary in particular, we discover that purity functions on multiple and varying levels and is presented in several different forms throughout the narrative: ritual, menstrual, and sexual, but also possibly moral and genealogical as well. In my view, the *Protevangelium of James*' interest in purity is prominent enough throughout the text that analysis of this feature may help us to situate the text – geographically, temporally, and in relationship to Judaism.

Thus I frame my discourse on ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in conversation with other Jewish and Christian ideas on each type of purity discussed. Accordingly, each purity chapter that follows (2–4) provides a description and a general survey of various views held on the respective types of purity. I position our text's views on the "purity map" throughout each chapter by pointing to where our text and other writings share similar features and views. Our text's interest in menstrual purity, in particular, may recall similar concerns prominent in Syrian Christian writings like the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, as does the text's emphasis on Mary's *virginitas in partu* call to mind the Syrian writings of Ode 19 of the *Odes of Solomon*, *Ascension of Isaiah* and Ignatius of Antioch's *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1. Additionally, the text's positive portrayal of Mary's sexual purity, but also dual status as Ever-Virgin Mother, may very well draw on the religious trends in Syria such as the influence of Marcionism, Docetism, and the heated debates on ideas such as an "Ascetic versus married life." As such, my focused discussion on the theme of purity as presented to us through the characterization of Mary as pure may lend further credence to the suggestion of its Syrian provenance

¹¹⁹ See n. 2 above for a list of scholars who have accepted this approximate date.

¹²⁰ See section on provenance above.

by Smid, Cameron, Elliott, and others. We now turn our focus to the complex theme of purity.

Chapter Two

Mary, the Temple, and Ritual Purity

A. Introduction

In this chapter we now turn to the theme of ritual purity, since this type of purity dominates the first half of the narrative. The general “purity map” of the various views held on ritual purity will help us pinpoint the *Protevangelium of James*’ views on the topic and enhance our interpretation of Mary as a character in the text. In addition, such a map will highlight the text’s relationship to Judaism and help clarify the aims of the text.¹ Following a general survey of biblical, Qumranic, rabbinic, and other early Jewish and Christian ideas concerning ritual purity, this chapter will then consider the text itself to explore the nature and purpose of ritual purity within our narrative, noting where the *Protevangelium of James* fits in the overall picture that emerges.

B. What is Ritual Purity/Impurity?

In order to examine the narrative’s presentation of Mary as ritually pure and to show that ritual purity is indeed a dominant theme in our narrative, we must be clear about what we mean by ritual purity and conversely, ritual impurity. A general description of ritual purity/impurity as articulated in the Hebrew Bible provides a convenient starting point since this text forms the foundation of all ancient Jewish literature and remains the basis for un-

¹ Since material on this topic is vast, my intention is not to provide a thorough discussion on the entire history of the study of ritual impurity in ancient Judaism, but rather to provide a general description of various views held on the subject to help situate the *Protevangelium of James*’ ideas on purity on the “purity map.” Thus I will not analyze every text or source that focuses on ritual impurity, nor discuss in detail the significant research and all the contributions to this important topic. For a survey on the history of *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4–20 and *Susan Haber, “They Shall Purify Themselves”: Essays on Purity in Early Judaism* (ed. Adele Reinhartz; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 9–71.

derstanding and interpreting other sources such as Philo, the proto-sectarian and sectarian writings from Qumran, tannaitic documents (early rabbinic sages), and the New Testament writings. Since this analysis of the *Protevangelium of James* focuses heavily on identifying precisely when Mary is in a state of ritual purity or impurity and describing the proper practice of sacrifice, two aspects of ritual purity/impurity in particular merit attention: [1] how it is often contrasted with moral purity/impurity and described in terms of its relationship to sin, or lack thereof; and [2] how it is closely related to sacrifice and accessing the sacred (e.g., the temple).

I. Ritual Purity/Impurity in the Hebrew Bible

What is ritual impurity? A number of important critical contributions increase our understanding of the systems of defilement in the Hebrew Bible. Among the most foundational are the works of David Hoffmann,² Adolph Büchler,³ Mary Douglas,⁴ Jacob Neusner,⁵ Jacob Milgrom,⁶ Tikva Frymer-

² David Hoffmann, *Sefer va-Yikra Meforash* (trans. Z. Har Shefer and A. Liberman; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1952, 1953); trans. of *Das Buch Leviticus* (2 vols.; Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1913, 1922). Hoffmann is credited as the first modern scholar to clearly identify two kinds of defilement: [1] bodily defilement that stands in opposition to purity; [2] defilement that stands in opposition to holiness.

³ Adolph Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928; repr., New York: Ktav, 1967). Building on the work of Hoffmann, Büchler distinguishes between a “levitical” defilement that arises from ritual activity and a “religious” defilement, which arises from sin.

⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge Classics, 1966; repr., London: Routledge Classics, 2002). As one of the most influential studies on pollution and social structure, Douglas’ anthropological work on impurity is credited for laying down the theoretical foundation for all important scholarly discussion and works on ritual impurity in the Hebrew Bible. For the purposes of this study, Douglas’ most important contribution is her systematization of cultural impurity practices. For Douglas, “where there is dirt, there is a system” and in this system of ordering and classifying matter, “dirt is simply ‘matter out of place.’” See also Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999) for further discussion on Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* study.

⁵ Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). Neusner argues for two ideas about purity and impurity in ancient Israel. First, purity and impurity are related to the cult; those who are pure may participate in the cult whereby those who are impure may not. For the most part, cultic impurity concerns itself with purity laws in order to identify when one is in a state of purity or impurity, and how to move back from a state of impurity to purity. Second, purity and impurity are metaphors for moral and religious behaviour.

⁶ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3, 3A, 3B; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001). Milgrom’s massive three volume commentary on Leviticus provides important analysis and discussion of various details

Kensky,⁷ David P. Wright,⁸ and Jonathan Klawans.⁹ Since Klawans' interpretation of the Israelite impurity system is clear and concise, builds heavily on the aforementioned scholars, and focuses on the relationship between ritual and moral purity as well as the temple (key concerns in our text), the description of ritual impurity provided below will be informed by his study. In the Hebrew Bible, ritual impurity is classified as defilements arising from direct or indirect contact with natural sources such as childbirth (Lev 12:1–8), scale disease (Lev 13:1–14:32), genital discharges (Lev 15:1–33), the carcasses of certain impure animals (Lev 11:1–47), and human corpses (Num 19:10–22). Klawans argues that these impurities share three general characteristics: [1] they are natural, unavoidable, and even desirable since they reflect the conditions related to life (e.g., childbirth); [2] they are neither prohibited nor sinful;¹⁰ and [3] they are impermanent contagions that can be reversed by ritual acts of purification (e.g., bathing, sacrifice, etc.).¹¹ To be clear, generally speaking, ritual impurity in the Hebrew Bible does not result from sin and to be ritually impure is not sinful. Given that the *Protevangelium of James* describes the events surrounding

pertaining to the purity laws. Important to our study is Milgrom's discussion of the boundaries between purity/impurity and sacred/common.

⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399–410. In Frymer-Kensky's interpretation of the Israelite impurity system, two categories are offered: "contagious pollutions" and "danger beliefs." For Frymer-Kensky, "contagious pollutions" can be major or minor depending on how long the defilement lasts. Conversely, "danger beliefs" carry the threat of divine punishment and condemnation.

⁸ David P. Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity," in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 150–81 and idem, "Two Types of Impurity in the Priestly Writings of the Bible," *Koroth* 9 (1988): 180–93; idem, "Unclean and Clean (OT)," *ABD* 6:729–41. Wright provides an alternative system for understanding impurity in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike Büchler, Milgrom, or Frymer-Kensky, Wright's divisions of the purity laws are not as sharply marked and rather are presented more as a spectrum of categories. In his *Koroth* and *Anchor Bible Dictionary* contributions, Wright uses the terms "permitted" and "prohibited" to categorize the impurities, but in a later related article, "The Spectrum," Wright uses instead the term "tolerated" instead of "permitted" for one of his categories.

⁹ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*; and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See discussion in the body above.

¹⁰ There are two ways ritual impurity may lead to sin. The first way is to refuse to purify oneself after contracting corpse impurity. The second way is to enter the sancta or to have contact with the sacred in a state of ritual impurity. For why these two specific cases are exceptions, see my discussion in Chapter Three.

¹¹ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–26 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56, which is almost identical to his earlier work.

Mary's birth, childhood, and adolescent years, concern for ritual impurity becomes especially relevant for our text since it uses in particular the impurities that arise from these experiences in Mary's life as plot points throughout the narrative.

Significantly, our text displays no real concern for moral impurity.¹² Like scholars before him,¹³ Klawans notes that ritual impurity is often discussed in contrast with moral impurity and in relationship to sin. Moral impurity arises from immoral acts such as sexual sins (e.g., Lev 18:24–30), idolatry (e.g., Lev 19:31; 20:1–3), and bloodshed (e.g., Num 35:33–34).¹⁴ In opposition to ritual impurity, moral impurity is [1] a direct result of grave sin; [2] avoidable, and is not contagious – one need not bathe if contact with an idolater or murderer is made; [3] long lasting and sometimes permanently defiles the sinner and even the land of Israel; and [4] not reversible through acts of ritual purification, but rather can be ameliorated by punishment, atonement, and avoidance of sinful acts.¹⁵ Moral impurity is a result of sin, hence considered a significantly more severe kind of impurity. The distinction between ritual and moral impurity is especially important for our reading of the *Protevangelium of James* since the narrative presents no evidence of Mary's moral purity.¹⁶ Consequently, Mary's impurity is presented as a type that is relatively minor and unavoidable.

But why is being in a state of ritual purity important? In Leviticus, ritual purity is undeniably linked to sacrifice. Namely, being in a state of ritual purity allows one to enter the sanctuary to offer sacrifices, to access the divine, and *imitatio Dei*, thus becoming closer to God. For ancient Israel then, the requirement of ritual purity applied to three parties: those who offer the sacrifice (i.e., the Israelite); those who perform the sacrifice (i.e., the priests); and the sacrifice itself (i.e., the sacrificed animal), since all three parties access the sacred. Ritual impurity, by contrast, involves being in a state that prevents one from entering the sanctuary and from accessing the sacred.¹⁷ Additionally, a return from ritual impurity to purity involves acts of purification that are closely connected to sacrifice and by extension

¹² In Chapter Four on Sexual Purity, there are hints of a concern for Mary's moral purity, but it is directly linked to her sexual status as a virgin and whether or not she has remained one despite being married to Joseph. For more on this topic, refer to Chapter Four.

¹³ See n. 2–7 above and *Impurity and Sin*, 21–26 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56.

¹⁴ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–27 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56.

¹⁵ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–31 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56.

¹⁶ See n. 12 above.

¹⁷ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 58.

the role of the Temple, the priests, and its cult.¹⁸ As we will see, the theme of sacrifice, the temple and its cult as well as accessing the sacred from the perspective of offering, performing the offering, and being the offering play an important role in the *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of Mary's purity. More importantly, the text is especially concerned with those who are able to distinguish between pure and impure and thus be set aside as holy as God is holy.

II. Ritual Purity/Impurity in other Ancient Jewish Literature

The idea that ritual purity is a prerequisite for sacrifice and access to the sacred is argued by Klawans to be reflected in "virtually every ancient Jewish literary treatment of cultic themes in ancient Jewish literature, from the Hebrew Bible through rabbinic literature...."¹⁹ Since purity is inextricably linked to holiness, and access to God and his sacred things demand that one must be ritually pure, the crucial requirement of ritual purity continues as a consistent idea in other ancient Jewish literature.

One element that distinguishes other ancient Jewish writings' ideas of purity from the Hebrew Bible, however, can be found in the relationship between ritual and moral purity. Although the Hebrew Bible makes a distinction between ritual and moral purity, it also juxtaposes ritual and moral impurity discussions without providing a clear explanation of their connection. Not surprisingly, this ambiguity resulted in questions concerning the connection between ritual purity, moral purity, and the defiling force of sin, for which various Jewish groups offered different answers.

III. Philo

In accordance with Scripture, Philo, for instance, also understood ritual impurity to be natural, often unavoidable, and not sinful. Although Philo was clear about the distinction between ritual and moral impurity – the former impurity is resolved by ritual purification and the latter impurity is resolved by sacrificial acts of atonement – this did not stop him from analogically connecting the two types of impurity. In his treatise *De Specialibus Legibus*, Philo writes:

We have described to the best of our ability the regulations for sacrifices and will next proceed to speak of those who offer them. The Law would have such a person pure in body and soul, the soul purged of its passions and distempers and infirmities and every viciousness of word and deed, the body of the things which commonly defile it. For each it devised the purifications which befitted it. For the soul it used the animals which the

worshipper is providing for sacrifice, for the body sprinklings and ablutions of which we will speak a little later (*Spec. 1.256–261*).²⁰

Philo here seems to recognize ritual impurity as the physical analogue of moral impurity (i.e., physical impurities that affect the body serve as symbolic reminders of the moral sins that affect the soul).²¹ Without doubt, Philo's main concern is the purification of the soul and the ways in which it can be defiled by passion and various sins. While the laws concerning ritual impurity are not to be ignored, they are for Philo not as important as purification of the soul. It is for this reason that Klawans argues that Philo's approach is similar to the Hebrew Bible's teaching that sin can defile a sinner's soul without ritually defiling the sinner's body (Lev 18:24). Klawans notes, however, an important difference between the two views held; namely, whereas idolatry, incest, and murder are usually the culprits for moral defilement and their effects on the land in the Bible, Philo understands the acts of defilement and sins in more general terms and is concerned more about their effect on the soul rather than the land. Since Scripture does not articulate any analogy between ritual and moral impurity, Philo's correlation of the two types of impurity is his own analogical invention.

In terms of the relationship between ritual purity and sacrifice, Philo is clear that purity is necessary to make sacrifices, enter the sanctuary, and access God, but as Neusner observes, Philo's interpretations are often expressed as "second-level metaphors" because they extend the process of allegorization to what has already been treated as a metaphor in Scripture.²² For instance, Scripture offers the interpretation of cultic and priestly purity as the spiritual virtue symbolized by purity. Citing Lev 22:4–7, Philo writes that the priests may not be blemished in order to touch the holy table; they must wash their hands and feet, symbolizing a blameless life (*Spec. 1:118*). For those who offer sacrifices, Philo offers the following rule: "The law should have such a person pure in body and soul, the soul purged of its passions...the body of the defilements which commonly beset it" (*Spec. 1:257*). Whereas sprinklings and ablutions are only needed to clean the body, the soul can only be purified by contemplating the perfection of the sacrificial victim: "For if you observe this with your reason rather than with your eyes you will proceed to wash away the sins and de-

²⁰ Translation adapted from F. Colson, *Philo*, vol. VII [LCL] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 249–251.

²¹ Philo, *Spec. 1.256–61*; for a discussion on this passage, see Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 64–65.

²² Neusner, *Idea of Purity*, 45–46. On impurity and Philo see also, É. Cothenet, "Pureté et impureté: Nouveau Testament," *Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplement* 9 (1979): 508–554.

¹⁸ On sacrifice and purity in Biblical Israel, see Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 3–49.

¹⁹ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 4.

filaments with which you have besmeared your whole life... For you will find that all this careful scrutiny of the animal is a symbol representing in a figure the reformation of your own conduct (*Spec.* 1:259–60).²³ In this way, Philo's concerns for ritual purity and sacrifice are influenced by his ideas that ritual and moral purity are analogous: you must be both ritually and morally pure to offer sacrifice. According to Philo, sinners must be excluded from the sanctuary not because they have ritually impure bodies but because they have morally impure souls.

IV. The Scrolls

In the writings at Qumran, differing views held about the relationship between ritual and moral impurity have been distinguished among the collection.²⁴ For instance, while the proto-sectarian Temple Scroll's and 4QMMT's understanding of ritual impurity are more stringent and expansive than those found in the Bible (e.g., older prohibitions are strengthened and new prohibitions are mandated),²⁵ they do reflect Scriptural understanding of ritual impurity as not the result of sin.²⁶ Conversely, the sectarian writings of 1QS, 1QM, and 1QH articulate the relationship between

²³ Neusner, *Idea of Purity*, 45–46.

²⁴ In her study of the purity laws found at Qumran, Hannah Harrington argues that although there are a variety of views held on the issue of ritual purity in the texts, a common theme still connects the writings together, namely, “a stringent standard of ritual purity”; Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 45. Contra Harrington, Ian Werrett suggests that a clearer understanding of the purity laws at Qumran can be better attained if each document were looked at in isolation since he argues that the documents reveal “nearly as much explicit disagreement as they do agreement”; Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3. Since space does not allow for a full discussion of every Qumran document that deals with ritual purity, discussion of specific documents will be limited to those that may help shed light on ritual purity issues found in our text.

²⁵ E.g., males under the age of 20 are excluded from the temple (11QT 39:7–9), blind people are ritually defiling (11QT 45:12–14; 4QMMT B 49–54), immersion of water and waiting until sunset is required to be considered ritually pure again (11QT 49:19–21), the realm of the sacred spans to include the entire city of Jerusalem (11QT 45:11–12; 4QMMT B 27–33, 58–62), etc.

²⁶ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 48–52, 72–75. As with the other documents connected to Qumran, each text displays a variety of ideas concerning ritual purity – some reflect biblical laws, but others do not. In the example above, the Temple Scroll and 4QMMT ideas concerning ritual purity's relationship to sin seem to reflect Torah, but other ideas concerning ritual purity are completely innovative and reflect beliefs found in other sectarian writings at Qumran such as the stringency of the ritual purity laws. For instance, in the Temple Scroll, new prohibitions are added, old ones are strengthened, purification rituals are intensified, and the locus of sanctity is expanded to include not only the temple, but also the entire city. See also Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 111 and 169–79; 182 and 202 n.

ritual and moral impurity as a single conception of defilement, having both ritual and moral implications. Klawans notes, for instance, five ways in which ritual and moral impurity are no longer divorced in the sectarian literature of Qumran as they are in Scripture: 1. all sins, and not just those discussed in Leviticus 18, are described as impurities; 2. outsiders, who by definition sin, are considered to be ritually impure; 3. insiders are not to sin and those who do are considered defiling; 4. initiation involves participation in both ritual and moral purification; and 5. insiders who are ritually defiled are assumed so because they have participated in sin.²⁷ This idea is perhaps most apparent in the ways in which certain terms are used to denote both ritual and moral impurity. Klawans notes that the term abomination (*twybh*), which is used primarily with regards to sexual, idolatrous, and murderous sins (and secondarily but metaphorically with regard to sinfulness in general) is used consistently in sectarian literature to refer to sin and sinfulness in general. Likewise, the word *niddah* (נִדָּה), which is used primarily to refer to menstruation in the Hebrew Bible, is used not metaphorically or as a simile as it is sometimes employed in the Scripture (e.g., Ezek. 36:17; Lam 1:18; Lev 20:21; Ezra 9:11, etc.), but as a term to connote sinfulness itself: CD 3:17; “Rather, they wallow in human sin and in the ways of impurity” (וְהָם הַתְּגִולְוִו בְּפִשְׁעָ אָנוֹשׁ וּבְדַרְכֵי נִדָּה).²⁸

This combining of ritual and moral ideas of impurity stands in sharp contrast to the Hebrew Bible where ritual and moral impurity are distinct.²⁹ For many sectarian writings of Qumran, sin was ritually defiling and required purification and those who became ritually impure required not only purification, but atonement as well, thus providing evidence of an amalgamation of the two purity systems outlined in Leviticus. In other words, for some Qumran sectarian documents, ritual impurity could be seen as somewhat avoidable (if extremely stringent purity laws were enforced) and linked with sin.³⁰

Generally, given that the purity rules found at Qumran are somewhat stricter than the biblical and rabbinic purity laws (even for those documents that did not combine notions of ritual and moral impurity),³¹ access to the sanctuary and to the sacred may have been more difficult.³² This al-

²⁷ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 75.

²⁸ For further discussion of Qumranic literature on menstrual purity and impurity, see Chapter Three.

²⁹ Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 13; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 67–91.

³⁰ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 79–91.

³¹ See below and especially the beginning section of Chapter Three.

³² This stricter view held by Qumranic literature is evident not only in asserting the longer periods of defilement for impurities already discussed in the biblical purity laws, but also in the inclusion of new sources of defilement. 11QT 45:12–14, for instance, seems to consider the blind to be ritually impure and prevent their access to the Temple.

ternate view of purity, however, did not change the fact that purity requirements were needed to access the divine, but rather that different and more difficult purity rules were required. For instance, whereas biblical legislation forbids a man who has a seminal emission from the temple for only one day (Lev 15:16; Deut. 23:10–11), 11QT 45.7–10 states that he is barred from the temple and remains in a state of impurity for three days. These purity rules associated with access to the Temple and the practice of sacrifices will prove particularly helpful in our plotting of the *Protovangelium of James*' views of purity given that the temple, its priests, and the offering of sacrifices are frequently described and provide important hints about the kinds of purity rules practiced in our narrative.

V. Rabbinic Literature

For the early rabbis, although there are some significant differences between the ritual impurity legislation found in the Pentateuch and the tannaim, the general consensus is that by and large, the sources for ritual impurity in tannaitic law are the same as in the Pentateuch. Namely, like the Hebrew Bible, the tannaitic sources see ritual impurity as natural and unavoidable, generally not sinful, and as an impermanent contagion.³³ Additionally, ritual impurities in tannaitic sources are, much like biblical laws, not only unavoidable, but obligatory and desirable. Priestly performance of cultic rituals, for instance, necessarily caused ritual impurity for the priest, but was no less required of them by the Mishnah than they were in the Pentateuch (e.g., *m. Kel* 1.1; *m. Parah* 4.4).

Clearly, the mishnaic purity system is strongly based on Scripture, but there are discernible differences between the two systems. Two are noteworthy. First, tannaitic sources uniquely made great efforts to keep discussions dealing with sin and atonement separate from discussions about defilement and purification in order to be clear that sin and defilement are concerns separate from ritual impurity. In other words, not only do tannaitic sources maintain a distinction between ritual and moral impurity, but they also compartmentalize them, drawing boundaries specifically between

Citing 4QMMT B 49–54, Klawans notes, however, that it is possible to interpret the ban of the blind from the temple based not on the fact that they were ritually impure, but because they could accidentally defile the temple precinct; *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 73, 189 n. 32.

³³ See esp. Neusner who argues that the mishnaic purity system is based heavily on Scripture, but with equally as many innovations to and interpretations of the biblical system; *A History of Mishnaic Law of Purities* (22 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1974–1977); vol. 3, 383; vol. 8, 221; vol. 16, 194; and vol. 18, 176 on the influence of Scripture; vol. 5, 230, 251–52; vol. 13 250–51; vol. 10, 207; and vol. 14, 195–97, 202–5 on mishnaic innovation to purity laws.

ritual impurity and sin.³⁴ Since purity rules are important for accessing the sacred, the result has been that the purity laws offered by rabbinic literature tend to be less strict than, for instance, the purity laws outlined in documents associated with Qumran and even biblical law in terms of accessing the sacred. For instance, *m. Kel* 1.5 allows a man who has immersed to enter parts of the temple, even if that person's state of ritual impurity technically lasts until sundown (cf. one day according to Lev 15:16; Deut 23:10–11; three days according 11QT 45.7–10). Second, as Neusner has noted, since the rabbis' system of purity shifted from being temple-centered to table-centered,³⁵ rabbinic purity laws eventually became reinterpreted and applied to other sacred activities such as prayer and torah study.

VI. NT Gospels and Pauline Corpus

The idea of ritual purity and its relationship to moral impurity in the NT gospels and Pauline Corpus is also not straightforward and seems to reflect a position somewhere between Qumran sectarians and tannaitic views of ritual impurity. For instance, according to Mark, John the Baptist's view of baptism as a means of removing moral defilement (literally "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" Mark 1:4) seems to suggest that moral impurity and ritual impurity were combined in some way since his practice of baptism can be seen as a "ritual of atonement."³⁶ And yet at the same time, John did not fully merge the two and viewed sin as a source of ritual defilement.³⁷ Jesus' ideas on ritual impurity too seem to reflect a middle ground between the ideas held by Qumran sectarians and the tannaim since Jesus did not completely separate ritual impurity and sin, but neither did he merge the two concepts together. Klawans suggests in his interpretation of Mark 7:15 that Jesus prioritized moral purity over ritual purity.³⁸ Following John and Jesus, Paul seems to have viewed baptism as

³⁴ Klawans suggests that this compartmentalization is best illustrated in the structure, language, and content of the Mishnah itself since not a single tractate is devoted to the defiling force of sin nor is it discussed in any literature that involves ritual impurity, which is significant given that more than one-sixth of the mishnah is devoted to issues of ritual impurity; *Impurity and Sin*, 94–99.

³⁵ Neusner, *History of Mishnaic Law of Purities*, vols. 22, 99.

³⁶ On John's baptism as a "ritual of atonement," see G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 32–34 and John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 53–55.

³⁷ As evident by the fact that, unlike the Qumran sectarians, John and his followers did not separate themselves from outsiders nor did they have to purify themselves after making contact with sinners. On this argument, see Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 141.

³⁸ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 143–50.

a ritual of atonement that could be an effective purification process for moral defilement, but he was also clear that the requirements for ritual purity laws differed for Jewish Christ-believers and Gentile Christ-believers (e.g., Acts 15, 21; 1 Cor 7).

This brief summary of the variety of views, biblical and otherwise, regarding ritual impurity paves the way for an examination of the *Protevangelium of James*' position on this central theme as the narrative unfolds and Mary's character emerges. The following analysis also enables us to position the text on the "purity map" in order to clarify the relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and other religious texts of its time.

C. The View of Ritual Purity in the *Protevangelium of James*

Literary analysis allows an exploration of how the essential theme of ritual purity operates in the *Protevangelium of James* to depict Mary and inform the text as a whole. From the very beginning of the narrative, the stage is set for the author's presentation of Mary as the "Virgin of the Lord" (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7). In order to investigate the significance of this initial as well as subsequent portrayals of Mary, I analyze how the language of purity is used and consider questions about how Mary's purity functions in the narrative, focusing on an examination of key words related to sacrifice and purity in the *Protevangelium of James* (e.g., ἀκάθαρτος, ἀμίαντος, καθαρός, κοινός, μιαίνω, παρθένος, etc); parallels from the LXX will here prove particularly central.³⁹ This chapter will also discuss the ways in which the theme of ritual purity is communicated narratively, through the depiction of Mary's and her parents' relationship to the Temple and its priests, and metaphorically, through the use of terms related to sacrifice to describe her.

The overarching interest in ritual purity in the *Protevangelium of James* unfolds in two stages: [1] the events surrounding Anna's conception of Mary, as described in *Prot. Jas.* 1:1–5:8, and [2] the events surrounding the birth and infancy of Mary, as described in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9–8:2. Accordingly, this chapter falls into two parts, the first analyzing the importance of the Temple and ritual purity in the description of Mary's parents and the second analyzing how ritual purity and the Temple function in the description of Mary's early life and how Mary herself is described in language that recalls Temple sacrifice.

³⁹ See earlier discussion of the influence of the LXX on *Protevangelium of James* in Chapter One, esp. the section on the *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism.

I. The Jerusalem Temple and the Miraculous Conception

In the first eight chapters of the *Protevangelium of James*, the author provides information about Mary's parentage, conception, and birth. From the outset, we notice an interest in the Temple and the Jewish sacrificial system; by referencing proper sacrificial practice and ritual purity, for instance, the *Protevangelium of James* establishes that Mary's parents are righteous and pious Jews. They are faithful participants in the Temple cult and sacrifices according to the Jewish laws and customs of their time, as presented in the text.⁴⁰

In the very first line (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1), the third-person narrator provides a striking depiction of Joachim as a wealthy and devout man, who follows the precepts of purification and atonement through Temple sacrifice even beyond what the law entails: in *Prot. Jas.* 1:1–3, Joachim is said to have given twice as many offerings (δῶρον) as were required,⁴¹ some to atone for himself and the rest to atone for the sins of Israel. Just as Job is initially described as giving extra offerings in case of any unintentional sins by himself or his family (Job 1:5), so too does Joachim guard against the possibility that any of his sins have gone un-atoned or any impurity uncleansed. Indeed, Joachim's striking act of sacrificial generosity trumps even Job's righteous acts; whereas Job performs sacrifices for himself and his family, Joachim is also concerned to atone for the sins of the nation as a whole.

Although the reader is thus alerted to Joachim's piety, the other characters in the narrative question it, given that he is childless. Indeed, the second fact that the reader learns about Mary's parents is that they have not been able to conceive (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5). The narrative conveys this information by means of a statement attributed to Reubel; when Joachim comes to offer sacrifices on the "great day of the Lord," Reubel tells him that he cannot offer sacrifices first, since he has "begotten no children in Israel" (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5). When Reubel reproaches Joachim, Joachim seeks the "record of the twelve tribes of Israel" (ἱστορίας δώδεκα φυλῶν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ) for evidence of righteous Jews who have borne no children

⁴⁰ As my approach in this chapter is literary, oriented towards the narrative and its aims, my interest and questions concerning Judaism will be geared towards how Judaism is represented through the literary characterization of certain key figures. Inevitably, however, since historical inquiries concerning Jewish traditions, culture, and practices are bound to arise, they will also be considered so long as they offer important insights into our discussion.

⁴¹ Likewise, 1 Samuel describes Hannah's husband Elkannah as going up regularly to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth at Shiloh and as offering double portions for his wife Hannah (1 Sam 1:3–5).

(*Prot. Jas.* 1:6–7); finding none, he assumes that his suffering is the result of his sins (*Prot. Jas.* 1:9).

Within the narrative world of the *Protevangelium of James*, everyone assumes – beginning with Reubel and Joachim – that childbirth is inextricably connected to righteousness, and that marriage and parenthood are positive and pious. But since at the outset the author establishes Joachim's righteousness, the reader immediately recognizes that Reubel and Joachim have misread the situation: Joachim is not childless because he is unrighteous, but rather he is childless among the righteous. The reader is pointedly reminded of the biblical trope of the righteous but childless man by an explicit reference to Abraham. After Joachim searches through the “record of the twelve tribes of Israel,” he remembers “the patriarch Abraham that in his last days the Lord God gave him a son, Isaac” (καὶ ἐμνήσθη τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἀβραάμ, ὅτι ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ αὐτοῦ ἡμέρᾳ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς υἱὸν τὸν Ἰσαάκ; *Prot. Jas.* 1:8; cf. Gen 18:1–2). The reference to Abraham serves both to confirm that Reubel has misunderstood the meaning of Joachim's childlessness and to emphasize Joachim's extreme righteousness. Moreover, Joachim's reference to Abraham suggests to the reader that he might still be able to have children with the help and power of God. This narrative device of deliberately referencing Abraham significantly serves to trigger the anticipation of the birth of a special and chosen child (cf. Gen 16:2; 20:18), and by extension, draw on the pattern of other biblical tales of barren women who ended up giving birth to special (male) children.⁴²

Joachim then decides, however, to banish himself into the wilderness. The author offers two reasons: his extreme sadness and his desire to fast and pray to God (*Prot. Jas.* 1:9); in effect, fasting, petition, and prayer serve as ways for him to test his own righteousness. The references to prayer and fasting also function, from a literary perspective, to reinforce

⁴² In the Hebrew Bible, seven women are said to be afflicted with infertility and later blessed with children by God's will: Sarah (Gen 16–20), Rebecca (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:1), Samson's mother (Judges 13), Hannah (1 Sam 1), and Michal (2 Sam 6:23). In the NT Gospels, the same is said of Elizabeth (Luke 1). Anna's barrenness recalls these matriarchal figures – especially Sarah (to whom the narrative explicitly references in *Prot. Jas.* 2:9) and Hannah (who bears the Hebrew version of Anna's name). By modeling Anna's situation after these tales, the *Protevangelium of James* seems to signal to the reader to anticipate another miraculous birth. See Paul Foster, “The *Protevangelium of James*,” *ExpTim* 118.12 (2007): 573–82, esp. 576, for further discussion on the parallels between Anna and other barren women in the Hebrew Bible; idem, “The *Protevangelium of James*,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 113–16. Noteworthy is the fact that all of these miraculous children are male, which only heightens the importance of Anna's conception of Mary: a female child from a miraculous birth, who will play an even more significant role than any male figure before her.

his characterization as a pious Jew. Significantly, Joachim is described as withdrawing in sorrow for “forty days and forty nights” (*Prot. Jas.* 1:10), which recalls a number of important scenes in Biblical history; the purpose of the stretch of time is to evoke the symbolic struggles and testing of an important figure, but also the preparation time needed for the chosen person to do works sanctioned by God.⁴³ In particular, by fasting for this period in the wilderness, Joachim seems to pre-enact Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness, whereby he fasted and was tested by Satan (e.g., Matt 4:2).⁴⁴ The deliberate linguistic echoes of fasting symbolize and strongly suggest that Joachim too will be tested and shown to be unwavering; Mary's father will not jeopardize his faithfulness and loyalty to God even for what he desires most.

At the same time, Joachim's sojourn in the wilderness is depicted as a symbolic death, given that Anna's response to her husband's mysterious absence is to act as if he has died and put on mourning clothes (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1; 2:7). In fact, Anna's reaction and her laments over her widowhood and childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1)⁴⁵ form our introduction to her, confirming at the outset, as with Joachim, her righteousness.

Given the dramatic irony established by the text's omniscient, third-person narrative voice, readers simultaneously anticipate the revelation of the truth and observe crucial evidence of Anna's righteousness as she reacts to the false information. Namely, the narrator is able to depict Anna as a pious wife who, upon thinking that her husband has died, acts according-

⁴³ E.g., the period of 40 days and 40 nights recalls the story of Noah and the flood (Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6). After the covenant is sealed at Mt. Sinai, Moses is with God on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights (Exod 24:18). When the prophet Elijah is being pursued by Queen Jezebel, he flees for his life and travels 40 days and 40 nights until he comes to the mountain of God at Horeb (Sinai) (1 Kgs 19:8). The scene in Matt 4:2 that describes Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days and nights reflects most potently the symbolic connection between the testing Joachim must endure while in the wilderness for the same length of time. Finally, Jesus' ascension to heaven occurs 40 days after the Resurrection (Acts 1:3).

⁴⁴ The linguistic parallel between Joachim's and Jesus' fasting further supports the theory that the text intends to invoke Jesus' stay in the wilderness when describing Joachim's self-banishment scene. *Prot. Jas.* 1:10: καὶ ἐνήστευσεν τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας τεσσαράκοντα cf. Matt 4:2: καὶ νηστεύσας ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσεράκοντα, ὑστερὸν ἐπείνασεν.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, the reference to “widowhood and childlessness” in *Prot. Jas.* 2:1 (χηροσύνη καὶ ἀτεκνία) is paralleled in LXX Isa 47:9 (“but now these two things shall come upon you in a moment in one day, the loss of children and widowhood shall come in a moment upon you”; Νῦν δὲ ἥξει ἐπὶ σὲ τὰ δύο ταῦτα ἐξαίφνης ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ, ἀτεκνία καὶ χηρεία ἥξει ἐξαίφνης ἐπὶ σὲ). In Isaiah, the phrase occurs as part of a description of the punishment God will lay on Babylon for its mistreatment of Israel and serves to convey an image of utter hopelessness. The *Protevangelium of James* may similarly seek to evoke hopelessness when depicting Anna's situation.

ly. Likewise, the author implies that she too, like Joachim, has misread her childlessness as an occasion for mourning rather than the portent of a miraculous birth.

Symbolically, the author demonstrates Anna's righteousness by creating meaning through the gap between what the reader knows and what the characters know.⁴⁶ Upon seeing her mistress weep and lament over the loss of her husband and over the state of her childlessness, Anna's maid servant Euthine reminds her that the great day of the Lord is not a time to mourn and offers her a headband (κεφαλοδέσμιον), which Euthine herself cannot wear because, as she reports, she is a "slave and it has a mark of royalty" (*Prot. Jas.* 2:4). The precise meaning of the term κεφαλοδέσμιον is obscure. From the narrative, however, it is clear that the object may carry some form of sin or involves some form of trickery or curse. The headband's symbolic nature, however, clearly propels the narrative when Anna immediately rejects it (lit. Away from me!) (Ἄποστηθι ἀπ' ἐμοῦ; *Prot. Jas.* 2:5) and accuses Euthine of attempting "to make [her] share in [her] sin" (καὶ ἡλθες κοινωνῆσαι με τῇ ἀμαρτιᾳ σου; *Prot. Jas.* 2:5). Anna's strong reaction to the headband connects her with Joachim's brand of righteousness in that she, too, will not accept any help to alleviate her barren state in any manner that might not be in accordance with God's will.

Regardless of the precise nature of the headband, what is made abundantly clear is that Anna will not accept anything about which she is not certain. This characteristic speaks to her faith in God: Anna desperately wants to conceive a child, but she will not seek to do so at the risk of any possible sins against God or any possible association with any demon.⁴⁷

Euthine's subsequent reproach of Anna parallels and recalls Reubel's earlier reproach of Joachim.⁴⁸ Euthine links Anna's barrenness to divine disfavour: "The Lord God has shut up your womb to give you no fruit in

⁴⁶ For a discussion and an analysis of the use of gaps between first-person direct speech and third-person narrative statements to create meaning in the Hebrew Bible, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 186–229; 264–320.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Anna's rejection of the "headband" in *Prot. Jas.* 2:5 may also be related to what is engraved on it; the "royal mark" may be an indirect indication of Anna's Davidic lineage. This possibility is, of course, intriguing in light of the messianic overtones and the fact that both Anna's and her husband's actions show that they want their child to be authorized by God and the Temple.

⁴⁸ This passage also recalls the tales of Sarah and Hannah: Hagar mocks Sarah for her inability to conceive (Gen 16:4–5), and Penninah is described as provoking Hannah severely "to irritate her, because the Lord has closed her womb" (1 Sam 1:6). In the LXX version of 1 Samuel, Hannah's despondency is attributed solely to her inability to conceive; that is, the conflict between Hannah and Penninah is only attested in the Hebrew Bible, indicating that the *Protevangelium of James* may be closer in content to the Hebrew version of 1 Samuel than to the LXX.

Israel" (ἀπέκλεισεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὴν μήτραν σου, τοῦ μὴ δοῦναι οἱ καρπὸν ἐν Ἰσραὴλ; *Prot. Jas.* 2:6). Ironically, while Euthine errs in claiming that Anna will produce "no fruit in Israel," she is correct in her assertion that childbirth lies in the hands of God, who alone has the power to give birth to the barren or to close the wombs of the fertile – as the rest of the narrative will show.⁴⁹ Like Reubel, however, Euthine misreads Anna's childlessness as a sign of sin. In her capacity as foil, then, Euthine increases the reader's sympathy for Anna by offering continued misinterpretations of her situation. By introducing both Anna and Joachim through their interactions with unskilled foil characters, the author carefully guides his readers to the proper method of assessing righteous behaviour: Joachim is generous, offers more than the necessary sacrifices, and prays and fasts, while Anna prays, resists any form of "magic," and adopts the proper mourning practices when she thinks her husband is dead (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1).

After the discussion with Euthine, Anna removes her mourning clothes and dons her wedding dress, presumably in preparation for "the great day of the Lord" (ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου ἡ μεγάλη; *Prot. Jas.* 2:2). This change of clothing serves as a symbolic marker of Anna's shift from barrenness to fertility, accompanied by the realization that God controls all. That this turn of events in the narrative is initiated by the fast approaching and very significant "great day of the Lord" requires further consideration. Namely, what is precisely the "great day of the Lord," to which the narrator refers?

In his study on the impact of Yom Kippur on early Christianity, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra notes that there are three principle name forms used to refer to Yom Kippur based on the description of its purpose (i.e., atonement), its common practice (i.e., fasting), and its solemnity.⁵⁰ The third purpose may hint towards the *Protevangelium of James*' allusion to this significant holiday. Stökl Ben Ezra notes that one of the biblical uses for the term Yom Kippur in Lev 16:31 is τὴν ταῦτα, which the Septuagint translates as "the Sabbath of Sabbaths." To underscore the importance of the holiday, Philo also refers to Yom Kippur as ἑορτῶν τὴν μεγίστην

⁴⁹ Cf. the use of ἀποκλείω for Anna in *Prot. Jas.* (2:6: ἀπέκλεισεν...μήτραν) to refer to infertility or "closed/shut up womb" to the use of συγκλείω for Sarah (LXX Gen 20:18: συγκλείων συνέκλεισε ...μήτραν) and Hannah (LXX Sam 1:6: συνέκλεισε ...μήτραν) in the LXX.

⁵⁰ Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 16–17. Also very useful for tracing the history and use of the term Yom Kippur in early Judaism (biblical and rabbinic) and Christianity are the studies offered in Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas, *The Day of Atonement: Its Interpretation in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions* (TBN 15; Leiden: Brill, 2012), especially the contribution by Gunter Stemberger.

ην (highest holiday).⁵¹ Likewise, the *Protevangelium of James*' triple reference to "the great day of the Lord" (*Prot. Jas.* 1:4, 2:2, 2:3) may refer to Yom Kippur given the text's clear emphasis on the solemnity of the festival. In my view, the identification of the "great day of the Lord" with Yom Kippur also makes sense in light of the multiple references to Joachim's sacrifices for atonement in *Prot. Jas.* 1:2, 5:1.

Writing against the grain,⁵² Neville Tidwell suggests a connection between the use of κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου "the Lord's Day of the Lord" in *Didache* 14.1 and the Hebrew use of שְׁבַת חַנּוֹן, "Sabbath of Sabbaths," in support of his argument that the community of the *Didache* observed Yom Kippur.⁵³ Tidwell's argument that "the Lord's Day of the Lord" is indeed used to refer to Yom Kippur and not simply to the weekly Lord's day is based on the use of the word κύριος without the definite article, which he sees as corresponding to the Septuagint's translations of a special

⁵¹ Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 16–17.

⁵² See Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 213–18. On this phrase interpreted as the "Sunday of the Lord" and its connection to the Eucharist, breaking of bread, thanksgiving, confession of sins, etc., see Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg, eds., *Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings* (Symposium Series 45; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 52; van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 35 and 241; Kari Syreeni, "The Sermon on the Mount and the Two Ways Teaching of the Didache," in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (ed. Huub van de Sandt; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 103. On the community's understanding of this practice on this particular day as being connected to sacrifice and the confession of sins, see Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope, and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50 – 70 C.E.* (New York: Newman, 2003); idem, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2003), 77–78.

⁵³ Neville Tidwell, "Didache XIV:1 (ΚΑΤΑ ΚΥΠΙΑΚΗΝ ΔΕ ΚΥΠΙΟΥ) Revisited," *VC* 53 (1999): 197–207. Tidwell also bases his argument that the "Lord's day of the Lord" refers to Yom Kippur by considering similar thematic concerns. In his reading, Tidwell notes that *Didache* 14's concern for confession and reconciliation matches the concerns of *m. Yoma* 8.9. He also notes the importance of the role of the name of the Lord both in the *Didache* and in the Temple ritual associated with Yom Kippur in *m. Yoma*. Stökl Ben Ezra acknowledges the "Lord's day of the Lord" as one of the names used to refer to Yom Kippur, and the themes of confession, reconciliation, and the significance given to God's names as being associated with Yom Kippur; he is not, however, convinced by Tidwell's argument based on when the sacrificial common meal takes place in *Didache* 14. Stökl Ben Ezra argues that this special meal seems to take place on the actual "Lord's day of the Lord," and therefore should be considered more closely linked to anti-ritual against Yom Kippur – similar to what he explains as "the pork barbecue that some secular Jews hold on the Day of Atonement in our times." He goes on to suggest that the lack of a specific date for the meal allows for the interpretation of other festivals, e.g., Easter (Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 213–18).

superlative found in the Hebrew Bible using the tetragrammaton.⁵⁴ Whether one is convinced of Tidwell's conclusions or not, the use of this pleonastic phrase as an alternative to a phrase like καθ' ἡμέραν δὲ κυρίου or κατὰ κυριακὴν at the very least seems to indicate the continued use of Jewish practices (e.g., Sabbath) among some Christian circles.⁵⁵ If it is possible that the *Didache* 14.1's use of "the Lord's day of the Lord" could be understood as being equivalent to "Sabbath of Sabbaths" or "Yom Kippur," so it may too be possible that the phrase "great day of the Lord" used at *Prot. Jas.* 1:4, 2:2, and 2:3 refers to the same important festival. If this assessment is correct, it may explain why Anna changes from mourning clothes to her wedding dress in *Prot. Jas.* 2:7.⁵⁶ A tradition attributed to R. Simeon b. Gamaliel in *m. Ta'an* 4.8, for instance, states that the "daughters of Jerusalem used to go forth in white dresses" (בָּתָות יְרוּשָׁלָם יֵצְאֹת וְחַנּוֹנָה בְּכַרְמִים) and danced in the vineyards (לְבָנָתָה שְׁמַלְתָּה) on Yom Kippur (וכי יְמֵי הַכִּפּוּרִים). The striking contrast between this image expressing the inappropriateness of wearing mourning garments on the Day of Atonement⁵⁷ and the solemn image of this festival in biblical sources such as Leviticus 26 is noteworthy.⁵⁸ In Second Temple Literature like Jubilees and Qumranic writings such as the Damascus Document and

⁵⁴ Tidwell, "Didache XIV:1," 200.

⁵⁵ Van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 350–53.

⁵⁶ Cf. Rev 3:4–5, which describes those dressed in white robes that are still worthy and righteous. The reference to the Book of Life with those dressed in white robes shows clear eschatological overtones and the possibility for a connection between the "last days" with the reference to the "day of the Lord" in our text above. Cf. also Rev 16:15 and Matt 22:12 for further connections to the eschatological overtones to the "day of the Lord." See also how clothes are used metaphorically in the NT, e.g., in Rev 19:8.

⁵⁷ The view that Yom Kippur should be understood as a day for rejoicing and celebration is also attested in *m. Yoma* 7.4 when the high priest is described as celebrating with his friends after completing the proper rites in the sanctuary unharmed: "And he made a festive celebration for his friends when he came out safely from the sanctuary." In support of the fasting and atoning of sins as well as the joyous celebratory view of Yom Kippur, Philo reports that Yom Kippur serves both the need to atone through fasting but also celebrate festively (*Spec.* 1.186–87). For a good survey on the differing views held by the Qumran Scrolls and a variety of Second Temple Writings on the purpose and spirit of Yom Kippur, see Joseph M. Baumgarten, "Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls and Second Temple Sources," *DSD* 6.2 (1999): 184–91, esp. 189–91 for the view that Yom Kippur should be regarded as a day of fasting and atonement, but also a joyous celebration.

⁵⁸ Although in Lev 26 the view of Yom Kippur is clearly one of solemnity, there is an instance in Lev 25:10 that describes Yom Kippur as a day for celebration since it was on this day (Yom Kippur) that the Shofar proclaimed that in this year of Jubilee property rights would be returned to their owners and Israelite slaves would gain their freedom. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1066 and Baumgarten, "Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls," 185.

liturgical fragments from Cave 4, the solemn view of Yom Kippur is more severe, proscribing a holiday full of grief and mourning.⁵⁹ If this reading of *Prot. Jas.* 2:7 is correct, the *Protevangelium of James* may be closer to mishnaic rather than Levitical or Qumranic ideas concerning practices related to the celebration of Yom Kippur.

This connection also opens up other interesting possibilities for understanding the text's representation of – and relation to – Judaism. Significantly, the *Protevangelium of James* is unusual, among early Christian writings, in viewing Yom Kippur positively in relation to the Temple; Barnabas 7:3–5, for instance, explicitly argues against participation in the Yom Kippur fast inasmuch as this Jewish practice is seen to have been superseded by the death of Jesus and replaced by the Christian practice of the Eucharist.⁶⁰ Moreover, if the *Protevangelium of James* does indeed place

⁵⁹ In *Jubilees*, for instance, the writer interprets Yom Kippur as a day of mourning and self-affliction. In accordance with this view, Anke Dorman examines the two references to Yom Kippur in *Jubilees* 5:17–18 and 6:2 and 34:18–19 and explains that the purpose in the rewritings of the flood story and the death of Joseph (from which the two references to the day of atonement are made) was to elaborate the origins of Yom Kippur as a day connected to the ritual of atonement and mourning; “‘Commit Injustice and Shed Innocent Blood’: Motives Behind the Institution of the Day of Atonement in the Book of *Jubilees*,” in *The Day of Atonement: Its Interpretation in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas; TBN 15; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 49–61. Baumgarten argues that the Damascus Document supports the view that Yom Kippur should be associated with mourning and affliction based on the term יּוֹם הַתְּעִנָּה used for Yom Kippur, which he contends takes its roots from the biblical injunction וְעַל נִצְחָנָה “you shall afflict yourselves” (Lev 16:29) (Baumgarten, “Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls,” 186). Baumgarten argues that the necessity of fasting and atonement for the Qumran community’s understanding of Yom Kippur had much to do with the ongoing struggle between good and evil and the view that acts of fasting and atonement served as a way to fight evil: “Yom Kippur was for them not only a day of self-affliction to purge the guilt inherited from the past, as it was in *Jubilees*. The fast was also a weapon in the struggle with the malevolent spirits threatening now to lead them astray” (Baumgarten, “Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls,” 188). Cf. William K. Gilders’ study on the meaning of Yom Kippur to the Qumran community in “The Day of Atonement in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Day of Atonement: Its Interpretation in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas; TBN 15; Leiden: Brill, 2012), at 67. Although Gilders admits that mourning and penitence was present in the piety of the Qumran sectarians, he argues instead that “rest” was the theme and purpose of this auspicious day.

⁶⁰ Stökl Ben Ezra argues that despite the negative attitudes towards the Yom Kippur Temple rituals in the first century, these attitudes did not necessarily equate to the non-practice of other customs associated with Yom Kippur such as the fast. For further discussion on the abolition of Yom Kippur by first and second century Christians, see Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 219–23. See also, idem, “Fasting with Jews, Thinking with Scapegoats: Some Remarks on Yom Kippur in Early Judaism and Christianity, in Particular 4Q541, Barnabas 7, Matthew 27 and Acts 27,” in *The Day of Atonement: Its*

the conception of Mary around Yom Kippur, the intention may be to evoke a symbolic connection: the messiah responsible for bringing final atonement for sin into the world would thus be born of a woman who was conceived on or near the Day of Atonement.

Whether or not *Prot. Jas.* 1:2, 2:2 and 2:3 refer to Yom Kippur, the text’s language also evokes eschatological imagery – and, perhaps by extension, Mary’s role in salvation history. For example, the use of the phrase “great day of the Lord” recalls the phrase “day of the Lord” (ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου) in biblical prophecy to refer to the Last Judgment. Specifically, LXX Joel 2:4, Ezek 13:5, and Isa 2:12 all employ the phrase the “day of the Lord” (ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου) when referencing the end of days or the Last Judgment. A similar usage also occurs in 1 Thess 5:2 and 2 Pet 3:10–13.⁶¹ As with the connections to Yom Kippur, it is not clear whether this passage in the *Protevangelium of James* intends to evoke the eschatological overtones of the phrase. The possibilities, however, are intriguing, particularly since the symbolic connection with the depiction of Mary as the mother of the messiah responsible for carrying out the ultimate atonement resonates with the double connotation of this phrase as denoting both the Day of Atonement and the Last Days.

The celebratory aspect of Anna’s change of clothing (*Prot. Jas.* 2:7) is followed by an account of her prayer (*Prot. Jas.* 2:9). This prayer begins with a reference to Sarah and Isaac (*Prot. Jas.* 2:9), thus recalling Joachim’s reference to Abraham and Isaac after he is reproached by Reubel (*Prot. Jas.* 1:8). Specifically, Anna prays to God to “bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed our mother Sarah and gave her a son, Isaac” (εὐλόγησόν με καὶ ἐπάκουσον τῆς δεήσεώς μου, καθὼς εὐλόγησας τὴν μητέρα Σάραν καὶ ἐδώκας αὐτῇ υἱὸν τὸν Ἰσαάκ; *Prot. Jas.* 2:9). Here again, the reference to the miraculous birth of Isaac serves to trigger the reader’s attentiveness to the biblical trope of the righteous but barren woman – and to the very possibility of divine intervention and miraculous birth.

Interpretation in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions (ed. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas; TBN 15; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 174–76 and Ferdinand R. Prostmeier’s extensive commentary on the Epistle of Barnabas; *Der Barnabasbrief: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

⁶¹ See Anders Runesson, “Judgment,” *NIDB* 3:457–66, for a helpful survey on judgment discourse in OT and postexilic texts including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and NT literature. See esp. 459 for the use of phrase “day of the Lord” to refer to a final judgment in OT writings, and 463–64 for NT texts. This contribution is also helpful in examining the various understandings and interpretations of “judgment” such as the diverse views of judgment and final judgment, the judge(s) and the judged, the communication of divine judgment, and the criteria of judgment.

After her prayer, Anna laments in despair over her inability to procreate. This expression of grief consists of a line of laments that begin with “Poor me! What am I like?” (*Οἴμοι, τίνι ὡμοιώθην ἐγώ; Prot. Jas. 3:4*). First, Anna questions the nature of her own birth (*Prot. Jas. 3:2*) and then proceeds to provide details concerning her treatment by others for what she deems as being “born a curse among the children of Israel” (*[ὅτι ἐγώ] κατάρα ἐγεννήθην ἐνώπιον τῶν ὑιῶν Ισραήλ; Prot. Jas. 3:3*). Anna reports that her condition has resulted in her being “reproached, mocked, and thrust out of the Temple of the Lord my God” (*καὶ ὠνειδίσθην καὶ ἐμυκτήρισαν καὶ ἐξώρισάν με ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ μου; Prot. Jas. 3:3*). This image, of course, is poignant as the first negative reference to the Temple in the *Protevangelium of James*; this depiction, as we will see, fits into a broader pattern entailing the introduction and resolution of misunderstandings related to the Temple staff.

Anna continues her lament by comparing herself to the birds of the sky, the domestic and wild animals of the land, and even the water and earth (*Prot. Jas. 3:4–8*). Unlike the rest of God’s creation, she alone is infertile. Although Anna’s statements are presented in the narrative as laments of despair, the content of her lament simultaneously serves to reinforce the blessedness of childbirth and motherhood, as part of the natural order of the divinely-created world. This positive view of childbirth, motherhood, and family is notable, particularly in light of the promotion of asceticism and the relatively negative views of marriage and sexuality in some NT texts and in many Patristic writings from the second and third centuries CE.⁶² Paul, for instance, elevates virginity over a married life (e.g., 1 Cor 7); his preference for celibacy, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes, “disqualified married people theologically as less engaged missionaries and less dedicated Christians” insofar as their hearts would inevitably be divided between their husband and the church.⁶³ Peter Brown also argues with regard to Paul’s views on marriage and celibacy that the married person, “was almost of necessity a half-Christian … the apostolic gift of celibacy

⁶² Chapter Four examines in detail ideas on virginity, celibacy, and marriage in biblical and early Jewish and Christian literature. Since 1 Cor 7, in particular, is a highly discussed passage, it along with other views on the superiority of virginity over marriage in various early Christian writings will be discussed there.

⁶³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 226. On the superiority of virginity over marriage, see also Elizabeth Castelli, “I Will Make Mary Male”: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub; New York: Routledge, 1991), 29–50; eadem, “Virginity and Its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,” *JFSR* 2 (1986): 61–88 and Chapter Four on Sexual Purity and ideas regarding celibacy and marriage.

was too precious a thing to extend to the church as a whole.”⁶⁴ In light of these views, Anna’s lament, by contrast, reinforces the idea of fertility and procreation as a celebratory and integral part of all elements in God’s created world.

Moreover, Anna’s recognition of the fruitfulness of all of God’s creations – not just the animal world but even the seas and earth – makes her eminently worthy of motherhood. Soon after her lament, in fact, a messenger of the Lord visits Anna to inform her that she will conceive and give birth to a child. Anna’s immediate response is a promise: “As the Lord my God lives, if I give birth whether male or female, I’ll offer it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it will serve him all the days of its life” (*Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός· ἐὰν γεννήσω εἴτε ἄρσενα εἴτε θῆλειαν, προσάξω αὐτὸ δῶρον κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ μου, καὶ ἔσται λειτουργῶν αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς ήμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ; Prot. Jas. 4:2*). The most striking feature about Anna’s promise to give her child as a “gift” (*δῶρον*) is that Mary, in effect, becomes Anna’s own personal sacrifice to the Lord. As the text later makes explicit, the giving of a gift to God is understood in terms of the Temple, to which Mary will later be dedicated (*Prot. Jas. 7:1*).⁶⁵ As with Joachim, then, Anna’s faith in God is described as inextricably linked to the giving of offerings to the Temple.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 56.

⁶⁵ This vow recalls the biblical stories of Samson (*Judg 13:5*) and Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), both of which feature (male) children for whom the Nazirite vow was made, by their mothers, even prior to their conception. The parallel proves especially interesting, since Nazirite vows were open to women, as well as men (e.g., 1 Sam 1:11) and entailed maintaining a level of purity beyond normal ritual purity: separation, abstention from wine and wine products, and regulation from cutting the hair for the Lord (*Num 6:1–21*). Note also that Luke seems to depict John the Baptist as a *Nazir* from birth (*Luke 1:15*; “for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit”). For a *Nazir* or *Nazirah*, the regulations for performing any sacrifices for the Lord are inextricably linked to their vows: all gifts/offerings to the Lord must be in accordance with the Nazirite law (*Num 6:14, 6:21*).

⁶⁶ In 1 Samuel, the Temple cult and sacrifices also play an important role in the narrative. According to 1 Chr 6:11–12, 19–20, Elkannah and Samuel have a priestly connection to the Kohathite family of Levites, whose responsibilities included the care of the ark (cf. *Num 3:31*). In this account, however, Elkannah is an Ephraimite, who does not have a specified priestly connection; see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary* (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 58–59. Here, he goes up regularly (*מִמָּה*; literally “from days to days”) to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth; Shiloh itself is an ancient cultic center and is the central sanctuary of the Israelite cult during the time of Samuel’s birth; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 59. Eli, the Temple priest, though mistaken about Hannah’s condition, acts as a witness to her vow; both Hannah and Elkannah actively participate in the

Much like Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 1:28,⁶⁷ Anna's prayer for a child results in a vow, and the transaction involves not only receiving a child from God but also giving back to God: she both asks and gives sacrificially. What is also striking about Anna's vow is that although it thematically recalls biblical tales about barren women birthing special children, it departs from such stories in a significant way; namely, it involves in particular the birth of a female child. In Hannah's case, a prayer is made specifically for a male child (LXX 1 Sam 1:11: σπέρμα ἀνδρῶν) whereas Anna makes a special point to include the fact that she welcomes a child of either gender (*Prot. Jas.* 4:2; ἐὰν γεννήσω εἰτε ἄρσενα εἰτε θῆλειαν); whether male or female, the child will be offered as a gift to the Lord. Moreover, whereas the prayers of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, the mother of Samson, Hannah and even Elizabeth result in the birth of important male figures, Anna's prayer results in the birth of Mary – the birth of a female child, which is significantly but surprisingly looked upon positively by all, including Mary's father Joachim.

Importantly, the righteousness of Anna's reply to the angel is confirmed by the events that immediately unfold: two messengers (ἄγγελοι δύο) come to tell Anna that Joachim is alive and returning to her. Moreover, the messengers recount to Anna that an angel or messenger of the Lord (ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου) visited Joachim with the news that he will be blessed with a child. The author's decision to inform Anna about Joachim's visit with angels third-hand (i.e., via two messengers) is significant from a literary perspective on a number of levels. First, the indirect manner in which information about Joachim is revealed to Anna evokes the spread-

Temple cult and are described as making the proper sacrifices; the Temple becomes Samuel's new home and all the proper preparations are made in order to prepare for the fulfillment of Hannah's vow. In this way, Anna's and Hannah's dedication of their children to God become aligned with the act of sacrificing itself, whereby both children become the reciprocated gift they once both requested (*Prot. Jas.* 2:9; 1 Sam 1:17).

⁶⁷ As noted above, the description of Anna's situation in the *Protevangelium of James* thematically parallels many elements of the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel. Both tales begin with the condition of infertility. For instance, Mary and Samuel are both born with the help of God to barren women who share the same name; both Anna and Hannah are taunted by their servants and express their bitterness and joy by means of song (*Prot. Jas.* 2:6, 3:2–8; 1 Sam 1:6; 2:10); both children are dedicated to the Lord before they are born (*Prot. Jas.* 4:2; 1 Sam 1:11); both women decide to wait a while longer before handing their child over to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:2; 1 Sam 1:22–23). Like Joachim, Samuel's father Elkannah is described as going up regularly to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth at Shiloh, and when offering sacrifices, would offer double portions for his wife Hannah (1 Sam 1:3–5). Hannah's relationship with the Temple priest also resonates with Joachim's and Anna's experience in that in both stories Eli misinterprets Hannah's deep and heartfelt prayer as drunkenness (1 Sam 1:13–14), while Reubel thinks Joachim's childlessness is the result of his sin (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5).

ing excitement about this miracle among the people. Second, this information, which has been passed on by multiple figures, may also serve to help explain the variance between whether Anna has conceived already (perfect form) or will conceive (future form) (ἴδου ἡ γυνή σου "Ἄννα ἐν γαστρὶ εῖληφεν/λήψεται; *Prot. Jas.* 4:4). In light of the manner in which Anna is told, the critical phrase that has continued to concern textual scholars seems to favour the perfect form indicating that Joachim was not involved in the conception since everything is reported to him not by his own wife, but by unnamed messengers.⁶⁸ Finally, the author's decision to present Anna with the material in this way may also speak again to the text's representation of the priesthood and Temple; it is notable that the two anonymous messengers believe, without question, Joachim's claim to have been visited by an angel of the Lord, in striking contrast with the pattern of testing and vindication of Mary's purity presented in the second half of the text.⁶⁹ In other words, the Jewish characters in the narrative may initially doubt Mary's purity and her family's righteousness and piety, but this representation is not simply an anti-Jewish trope on the blindness of the Jews or the like, as the same Jewish characters also consistently recognize and admit when they are wrong.

The news of Anna's pregnancy serves to initiate Joachim's return from the wilderness in *Prot. Jas.* 4:1. Symbolically, just as Joachim's sojourn in the wilderness was described in terms that recalled death, so his return is described in a way that resonates with themes of resurrection. Joachim's homecoming is victorious and free from the judgment once placed upon him by Reubel. More importantly, Joachim himself is described in joyous terms – he is alive and celebrates by offering sacrifices and embracing his wife. The language of death and resurrection is, of course, striking in that Joachim's actions foreshadow Jesus' own fate, and may also resonate with the forty days and nights of the Flood (Gen 6–9, esp. 7:4), which can be interpreted as a symbolic death and resurrection of the world itself. Indeed the story of Noah and the Flood becomes typologically connected with the resurrection of Christ as found in 1 Peter 3:18–21 as well as the apologetic and patristic exegesis of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and other church fathers.⁷⁰ Like the Flood, Joachim's isolation in the wilderness for forty days

⁶⁸ See Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 80 for a discussion of the MS variants on this phrase. De Strycker favours the perfect form, since the earlier Greek manuscripts contain the reading. Also, see Chapter Four for a discussion of the MS variants on this phrase.

⁶⁹ This pattern of testing and vindication is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

⁷⁰ In Justin's typological explanation, Noah is a symbol of Christ, the wood of the ark represents the wood of the cross, and the flood becomes a type of baptism. In addition to connections between the flood and resurrection, the early church fathers (e.g., Irenaeus,

and nights without food or drink brings him near death, but like the renewal of the earth, God's answer to Joachim's and Anna's prayers for a child allows Joachim to return to his wife full of life and promise.

Upon finding that the Lord has answered his prayers and that his wife will give birth to a child, Joachim's first instinct is not to return directly home to Anna, but rather to ensure that the proper sacrificial offerings are made (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7). In other words, he engages in precisely the practice that Reubel dissuaded him from because of his childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5 cf. 4:5–7). As with his doubling of offerings for the atonement of his sins and the sins of Israel as a whole in *Prot. Jas.* 1:2, Joachim is here described as offering a generous gift – not only to God in thanks, but even for those who mistreated him and mistook him for a sinner: ten lambs without blemish for the Lord, twelve calves for the priests and council of elders, and a hundred goats for the whole people (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7). When Joachim finally does return home to his wife, the scene capturing their reunion is poignant: for the first time readers see them together, despite their parallel experiences; barrenness may have kept them apart, but fertility brings them together.

The reunion of Anna and Joachim results in further demonstrations of their uprightness. Any remaining doubts concerning Joachim's pious character are dispelled when he is depicted as going to the Temple the next day to present his gifts (*Prot. Jas.* 5:1). In order to ensure his righteousness and to confirm the message given to him by the angel, Joachim looks at the "leaf/disc"⁷¹ (*πέταλον*; probably a leaf made of gold metal) the priest wears to see if it discloses any sin.⁷² This reference to the *πέταλον* seems

Tertullian, Clement, Origen, etc.) also utilize other interpretations including the flood as a sort of baptism of the earth; the ark as a type of Church of Christ, and Noah as a symbol of Christ, the second Adam, by whom humanity is saved. On the use and reinterpretation of the flood story in Genesis by the early church fathers and in early Christian literature, H.S. Benjamins' study provides a good overview; "Noah, the Ark, and the Flood in Early Christian Theology: the Ship of the Church in the Making," in *Interpretations of the Flood* (ed. Florentino García Martínez and Gerard P. Luttikhuijsen; TBN 1; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 134–49, esp. 140.

⁷¹ See Exod 28:31–43 on the vestments worn by the high priest. Along with the ephod and breastplate, a description of what is worn on the head includes an engraved rosette made of pure gold: "You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the Lord.' You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead." See also Zech 6:11 on the high priest's crown of silver and gold.

⁷² Ronald F. Hock has suggested that the polished disc may have served as a mirror, used to obtain divine revelation. The mirror would show either a distorted or unaltered image, depending on whether one was sinful or sinless; Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 39. Timothy Horner has suggested an alternative reading for the function of the "leaf" on the priest's head-

to support repeated suggestions that the recent events (i.e., angelic visits to Anna and Joachim and conception of Mary) may have occurred near or on Yom Kippur.⁷³ According to *m. Yoma* 3.4–7, the high priest is described as changing into golden clothes in the Temple court and then later into white clothes, once he enters the Parwah chamber (i.e., holy ground) on this special day.⁷⁴ Additionally, although Josephus writes precious little about Yom Kippur, he does make mention of this solemn day in two specific incidents in which the emphasis is on the garments worn by the high priest. In both cases (*B.J.* 5.236 and *A.J.* 3.159–178[179–187]) the high priest is depicted wearing the more ornate vestments as directed in Exodus 28 instead of the simple linen garments described in Lev 16:4 thus, supporting the possibility that the garments worn by the high priest were in accordance with dress expectations for Yom Kippur.⁷⁵ Moreover, according to Lev 16:30, the high priest was also required to request forgiveness for the iniquities on Yom Kippur, including transgressions and sins committed by himself and by his whole house "as it is written in the Law of your servant Moses, 'For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you;

band; he proposes that the metal disc/leaf was used as a form of divine disclosure and is a reference to the oracular power of Urim and Thummim described in Exod 28:30. Described by Josephus as sardonyxes (Josephus, *A.J.* 3.215–16), this metal disc/leaf took shape in the form of stones mounted on the shoulder of the priest in order to indicate whether God was present during sacrifices. See further Horner, "Jewish Aspects of the Protevangelium of James," *JECS* 12.3 (2004): 319–20, and also Num 27:2; Josh 6:6; and 1 Sam 14:41 for references linking the high priests with prophetic powers. The possible references to Urim and Thummim may also resonate with images expressed in texts such as Tongues of Fire (1Q29, 4Q376) and passages from the Testament of Job. In 1Q29 and 4Q376, tongues of fire are depicted as coming from the stones identified as Urim and are specifically associated with the priesthood. In the Testament of Job, Job is described as giving each of his three daughters a string girdle "about the appearance of which no man can speak" because they were not the product of earthly works, but which contained "celestial sparks of light [that] flashed through them like the rays of the sun." These heavenly objects may not have functioned in the same manner as what is known about the Urim and Thummim, but they are worthy of comparison given that they too are unearthly objects that contain the power to access the divine, i.e., access the heavens and witness what no other human may witness – Job's soul carried up by the angel into heaven (T. Job 11–12).

⁷³ See my discussion above where I suggest that Anna's change from her mourning to bridal garments (*Prot. Jas.* 2:7) could possibly be the result of her recognition and observance of Yom Kippur.

⁷⁴ The high priest is also described as wearing eight pieces of raiment while he ministers: tunic, drawers, turban, girdle, breastplate, apron, upper garment, and frontlet. According to *m. Yoma* 7.5, the Urim and Thummim were in these articles of clothing.

⁷⁵ On this point and why Josephus offers a description seemingly contradictory to the Lev 16:4, see Christopher T. Begg, "Yom Kippur in Josephus," in *The Day of Atonement: Its Interpretation in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas; TBN 15; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 108–109.

from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord.’’’ If Joachim’s appearance at the Temple after learning of his wife’s pregnancy is meant to be understood as occurring near or on the Day of Atonement, his gift-offerings are doubly effective. In other words, if Joachim’s gifts are generous enough to atone for his own sins and those of his family, but also for all the people on any regular day, how much more effective are offerings made on or near the very auspicious day set aside for the very purpose of atonement? Whatever Joachim saw in the polished disc/leaf on the priest’s headband results in his claim that ‘‘he saw no sin in it’’ and that ‘‘the Lord has been merciful to me and has forgiven me all my sins’’ (*Prot. Jas.* 5:2-3).

Three important details emerge concerning Joachim’s test to confirm that he is free from sin. First, the disc and headband present interesting parallels with Anna’s rejection of the headband offered to her by her slave Euthine in *Prot. Jas.* 2:4 that may have had some power to remedy her barren state. The fact that Joachim seems to rely on an object with ‘‘magical’’ powers seems to support the view that Euthine’s headband also contains ‘‘magical’’ power⁷⁶ – albeit of the wrong sort, potentially from a deceiver rather than certainly from God. The contrast between the two thus serves to heighten the sense of Joachim’s complete trust in the Temple as the nexus of divine power.

Second, the reference to the leaf of metal (probably gold) used on the vestment worn by the high priest along with its possible association with Yom Kippur also alludes to the biblical trope of the connection between the high priest and prophecy.⁷⁷ For instance, *m. Sot* 9.12 seems to associate

⁷⁶ That these two ‘‘magical’’ objects share some kind of connection is suggested by the fact that the two words used indicate objects worn on the body. Euthine offers Anna her κεφαλοδέσμιον literally a band, which is used for tying around one’s head, and Joachim puts his trust in τὸ πέταλον τοῦ ἱερέως literally ‘‘leaf of the priest,’’ which may refer to a leaf of metal used on the vestment worn on the high priest (cf. *Exod* 28:1-39).

⁷⁷ E.g., in *John* 11:51, the high priest is described as having prophetic powers precisely because he is the high priest. In other words, the gift of prophecy is found not in the person, per say, but in the ‘‘office.’’ Josephus also attributes to John Hyrcanus the role of both high priest and prophet and comments specifically on Hyrcanus’ ability to predict the future (*A.J.* 13.299-300; parallel account in *B.J.* 1.68-69). See also Wayne A. Grudem’s study on the broad range of meanings attached to the word ‘‘prophet’’ and the connection between the office of the priesthood and the gift of prophecy; *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1988, 2000). On the development of the priesthood from early divination with the use of Urim and Thummim through the early priests at Shiloh, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 66-114. See also Runesson, ‘‘Judgment,’’ *NIDB* 3:459 on the oracular medium of Urim and Thummim as tools for communicating divine verdicts. These two objects, kept in the breastplate of the high priest’s ritual garments (*Exod*

the cessation of prophesy with the dimming of the high priestly breast-plate (i.e., Urim and Thummim), an important factor in establishing the high priest’s ability to glimpse beyond mundane realities. This power of prophesy is particularly relevant in that the high priest’s second and third blessings for Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* (*Prot. Jas.* 6:2, 7:7) serve not only as blessings but also as predictions for her future.

Third, the last fact we are told about Joachim before Mary’s birth is that the Lord has forgiven him of all his sins and that he has been acquitted for all his transgressions (*Prot. Jas.* 5:4). Joachim’s double gift-offerings – along with their possible association with Yom Kippur – serve to ensure that any unknown sins or impurities belonging to him or the nation were cleansed (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5-7). Even more significantly, he also provides generous offerings after hearing his wife has conceived. These abundant offerings and attention to ritual purity ensure the reader, beyond any doubt, that Joachim is indeed righteous. Only at this point, when Anna’s and Joachim’s righteousness and ritual purity are firmly established and confirmed by Joachim’s visit to the Temple, does the text move to a description of Mary’s birth (*Prot. Jas.* 5:4).

Significantly, then, the description of the events surrounding the birth of Mary focus heavily on the piety of Anna and Joachim and the righteousness they continue to uphold even in the face of adversity. But more importantly, the definition of piety for Mary’s parents is articulated in terms of the Temple and the apparent assumption of the efficacy of sacrifice to cleanse sin. Joachim and Anna take an active role not only in ensuring that proper sacrifices are made for their own sins, but also that the sins of the entire nation are accounted for and cleansed.

As noted above, the plenitude of sacrifices described early in the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* offer intriguing suggestions concerning the possibility that the festival of Yom Kippur occurred very near to the events that unfold in the text. These associations resonate with the implication that all of Israel was cleansed and free of sin and impurity at the birth of Mary and thus allow for interesting analogies of Mary as the symbolic ideal Israel. Seen from this perspective, the pattern of Jewish doubting, displayed particularly by those associated with the priesthood and Temple, followed by tests and the realization of the truth may indeed help point towards a possible intended audience – namely, Jewish readers who themselves may doubt Mary’s purity and virginal birth, but who are depicted in the *Protevangelium of James* as having the capacity to be con-

28:30; *Lev* 8:8), were used not unlike divine revelations in dreams and prophetic utterances. As Urim and Thummim were administered specifically by the priests, their connection to oracles and prophecy belonged solely to them.

vinced and redeemed nonetheless.⁷⁸ An examination of the events surrounding the birth and infancy of Mary will help further our investigation of the place of ritual purity in general, the function of the Temple cult in particular, and perhaps even provide more hints towards an intended audience.

II. Mary as a Temple Sacrifice

After the confirmation of Joachim's righteousness, the *Protevangelium of James* turns to describe Mary's birth: "And so her pregnancy came to term, and in the seventh [or: ninth] month Anna gave birth" (*Prot. Jas.* 5:5). Although the MSS vary widely on the actual term of pregnancy, seven months is widely attested and supports a trope for significant births of all sorts.⁷⁹ P.W. van der Horst examines the motif of the "seven months child" and argues that it was usually reserved for "persons that were begotten by divine being or whose conception had been miraculous in one way or another."⁸⁰ Like the miraculous stories surrounding the birth of Moses,⁸¹ Anna's miraculous seven month pregnancy would most likely prompt the reader to

⁷⁸ Given that Justin Martyr shows very close contact with some of the major ideas in our narrative (e.g., birth in the cave, Mary's Davidic lineage, etc.), it is interesting to note the contrast between the positive view of "the Jews" in the *Protevangelium of James* and Justin's views of "the Jews" as simply blind to the truth, beyond salvation except at the end of time, and sinful despite and because of their Law-observance (esp. *Dial.* 26:1-4). While Justin does not exclude *all* Jews from God's inheritance, he is clear that those who participated in the death of Christ and refuse to repent would indeed be disinherited. See Jeffrey Siker, *Disinheriting Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991) 184 and Annette Yoshiko Reed, "The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology, Demonology, and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr," *JECS* 12.2 (2004): 141-71, esp. 155-59 for further discussion on this theme in Justin's works.

⁷⁹ The MSS attest widely to a number of different months of gestation; the most common include the seventh and the ninth month – although the sixth also appears quite often. See Boyd Lee Daniels, "The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*" (2 vols.; PhD diss., Duke University, 1956), 2.194-98. H.R. Smid argues that nine months is original; *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 47-48.

⁸⁰ P.W. van der Horst, "Seven Months' children in Jewish and Christian Literature from Antiquity," *ETL* 54 (1978): 346-60, esp. 359.

⁸¹ Darrell Hannah notes that according to later rabbinic tradition, Moses' conception and birth were painless (*Exodus Rabbah* 1.20), which was seen as proof that his mother Jochebed was a righteous woman not subject to the decree against Eve (*b. Sot* 12a); "The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity," *VC* 53.2 (1999): 165-96, esp. 185. A similar tradition can be found in Josephus, *A.J.* 2.218, on which see Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Moses," *JQR* 82.3/4 (1992): 285-328. Although no description is provided about whether Anna shared the same experience of a painless birth, no details are given that she endured any pain either.

anticipate an extraordinary and important figure – and as later events will show, without disappointment.

The detail the narrator provides immediately after Mary's birth increases the singular nature of this event. According to *Prot. Jas.* 5:9: "When the prescribed days were fulfilled, Anna cleansed herself of the flow of blood, and gave her breast to the child, and called her name Mary" (Πληρωθεισῶν δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἀπεσμῆστο ἡ Ἀννα τῆς ἀφέδρου αὐτῆς καὶ ἔδωκε μαστὸν τῇ παιδὶ καὶ ὠνόμασεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς Μαρία; *Prot. Jas.* 5:9). The issue at stake here involves post-partum pollution and purification, an element central to early Jewish discussions of ritual purity in relation to the female life-cycle, impurity, and fertility. In her 2006 study on menstruation, childbirth, and impurity in the Hebrew Bible, Tarja Philip suggests that the emphasis on the impure nature of the parturient's blood, in contrast to the positive fertility of the father's seed, are signs of the Israelite priests' ideology and intended, above all, to distinguish clearly between God and human beings. She explains the dynamic as follows:

In contrast to God, humans are sexually differentiated as male and female from the moment of their creation, and therefore God blessed their reproduction (Gen 1:27-28). One of the inherent components of human reproduction is its impurity. The otherness of God from humans may be called holiness, and holiness can't dwell next to impurity. The priests had to guard the holy against the impure, through teaching the people the impurity legislation, or through sacrificing the proper offerings for them.⁸²

In other words, the nature of a parturient's blood may be deemed ritually impure but not sinful, serving, in fact, as a distinguishing marker between human beings and the divine. By this interpretation, the impurity caused by childbirth is involuntary and the contraction of impurity through this natural process is inevitable. The responsibility of performing the proper purification rituals after the impurities are complete still belongs, however, to the parturient and negligence to act accordingly does result in sin and offence against God.

Seen from this perspective, Anna's first action after giving birth to her child is to act in accordance with Levitical law.⁸³ She is described, more specifically, as following the precepts in Lev 12:5, which prescribe that

⁸² Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (StBL 88; New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 68-72, 121-22.

⁸³ Cf. *Prot. Jas.* 19:16, where Mary is depicted as not needing to do this at her pregnancy and Luke 2:22, where Mary is explicitly mentioned presenting her son to the Lord only when the days for their purification according to laws of Moses were fulfilled. On the nature of the parturient's blood and whether or not this translates into the impurity of the child that is covered in impure blood from the womb, see Philip's discussion of the impurity of parturient in priestly law (*Menstruation and Childbirth*, 111-22).

when a woman conceives and “bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days.”⁸⁴ Levitical legislation (esp. Lev 12) states that the parturient is deemed ritually unclean for a limited amount of time during which she may not touch any holy thing or come into the sanctuary until the completion of her purification, but, significantly, does not proscribe feeding one’s child during this time period.

Unusually, however, the *Protevangelium of James* describes Anna as waiting to breastfeed and name Mary until after her post-partum impurity has passed. According to *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, it was only then that she offers her breast to the child (*εδωκε μαστὸν τῇ παιδὶ*) and gives her the name “Mary.” In this choice, Anna exceeds the requirements of Levitical law, which does not forbid feeding one’s child during the post-partum purification period.⁸⁵ If understood in juxtaposition to Leviticus 12, the *Protevangelium of James*’ account of Anna’s decision to wait the full number of prescribed days before feeding Mary evokes a perceived need to go beyond what is normally necessary to ensure the purity of this particular child, and in this case may reflect a view of post-partum impurity that more closely approaches the stringent laws found in the Scrolls.⁸⁶

Beverly R. Gaventa further notes that the narrative reveals nothing about Anna feeding Mary prior to the completion of her purification rite;

⁸⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 742–68.

⁸⁵ For an alternate reading, Jennifer A. Glancy, who locates the purity concerns of the text within Greco-Roman practice, suggests that Anna’s decision to wait may be explained by looking to the teachings of ancient medical writer, Soranus, who advised new mothers to delay nursing their infants. According to Soranus, early milk (colostrum) was cheesy and difficult to digest because it came from a mother whose body was unstable from the discharge of large amounts of blood. Glancy attempts to address the text’s important reference to Anna’s “required days of purification” by looking to the general ancient belief that milk was processed uterine blood and therefore the milk of a new mother was imperfectly sanitized, requiring her to wait before feeding her child. Because Glancy acknowledges at most only a tangential connection to the Jewish Christianity that flourished in the second century, her explanation for the reference to the required days of purification overlooks the more natural explanation for why Anna waits. In light of the narrative’s consistent portrayal of Anna’s and Joachim’s deep concern with offering proper sacrifices, Anna’s decision to wait is consistent and more straightforwardly read in light of the legislations on rituals concerning purity found in Leviticus. More on this argument, see Glancy’s *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111–112. For a full discussion on post-partum impurity and the process of purification, refer to Chapter Four.

⁸⁶ See Chapter Four for a comparison between Anna’s consistent need to go beyond what is necessary to ensure the purity of her daughter and the maximalist approach to post-partum impurity displayed in some sectarian literature connected to Qumran.

for any regular child, the result would have been death.⁸⁷ If we were to read this detail literally and biographically, the infant Mary would have demonstrated a miraculous feat. Gaventa suggests, however, that this feature of the text should not be read biographically, but rather serves to further demonstrate Mary’s superior purity.⁸⁸ On the one hand, the possibility that Mary is so exceptional that she can survive without food is not a reading we should dismiss entirely. In light of other miraculous and extraordinary activities in which the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary as participating, the miraculous dimension of not needing food would fit the narrative quite well. On the other hand, another option is that Mary was, like infants in many wealthy families in the ancient world, simply fed by a wet-nurse during this time. Although the author leaves both alternatives open, the stress on Anna’s delay in feeding Mary serves the narrative effectively by highlighting her mother’s concerted attempt to ensure that this child remains ritually pure.

The narrative then moves to Mary’s infancy years where her exceptional nature is reaffirmed. The narrator informs us that each day she “grew stronger” (*κραταιόω*; *Prot. Jas.* 6:1), in language parallel to that used of John the Baptist and Jesus in Luke 1:80 (*κραταιόω*) and 2:40 (*κραταιόω*), respectively. Mary excels and surpasses the expectations of even the most promising child. She is said, for instance, to walk at the age of six months: after Anna puts Mary down to see if she can stand, Mary walks seven steps and is then swept up into her mother’s arms (*Prot. Jas.* 6:2).

Scholars have long noted that the number seven holds multiple and significant meanings in biblical, Second Temple, NT, and early Christian traditions – most notably in relation to the seven days of Creation (Gen 1–2).⁸⁹ In this case, the reference to seven steps may also be meant to recall Ezekiel 40. In Ezekiel’s vision of the new Temple, seven steps are said to have led up to the gate of the outer court that faced both the north and south side.⁹⁰ This reference to Mary’s seven steps serves to remind the reader of Anna’s earlier promise to God to dedicate her to the Temple, to foreshadow Mary’s childhood in the Temple, and to evoke her own adult status as akin to a new Temple, by virtue of her motherhood of the messiah.

⁸⁷ Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 112.

⁸⁸ Gaventa, *Mary*, 112.

⁸⁹ See Richard Samuelli, *Seven the Sacred Number: Its use in Scripture and its Application to Biblical Criticism* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kissinger, 2003); *idem*, *The Heptadic Structure of Scripture* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kissinger, 2005); *idem*, *The Use of the Number Seven in Biblical Criticism* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kissinger, 2005).

⁹⁰ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 45.

Anna's remarkable vow as she sweeps Mary into her arms is particularly noteworthy: "As the Lord my God lives, you shall not walk on this ground (τὴν γῆν ταύτην) again until I take you into the Temple of the Lord" (*Prot. Jas.* 6:3). Anna again displays extraordinary concern for the preservation of Mary's purity, who walks seven steps on ordinary ground but will not walk again except on sacred ground. Here too, the ritual impurities of everyday life – which, by definition, are unavoidable and acceptable for all others – are precluded for Mary by means of Anna's efforts.

The reading of Mary's separation from ordinary ground in terms of purity is supported by the text's description of Anna's subsequent actions. According to *Prot. Jas.* 6:4, Anna turns Mary's bedroom into a sanctuary (άγιασμα) and does not allow anything profane/common (*κοινός*) or impure/unclean (*άκαθαρτος*) to pass through it.⁹¹

Significantly, the terms *κοινός* and *άκαθαρτος* are each used only here in the *Protevangelium of James*. Although the term *κοινός* occurs about twenty times in the LXX and OT apocrypha, it is only used in terms of ritual impurity in 1 Macc 1:47 and 1:62, where it describes the sacrifice of unclean beasts and the eating of unclean food, respectively.⁹² Likewise, in *Prot. Jas.* 6:4, the term may be intended to evoke the biblical laws concerning impurity inasmuch as it echoes the language of purity used in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9 with respect to Anna's post-partum purification.

The term *άκαθαρτος* occurs over a hundred times in the LXX and OT apocrypha and always in reference to ritual impurity – for instance, in the contexts of the need to distinguish between the clean and unclean, laws on purification offerings, and instructions concerning sacrifices.⁹³ The term usually renders these Hebrew terms: 1. אלה 2. טהר 3. נטן 4. חסונה. In the NT Gospels, *άκαθαρτος* is used only for unclean spirits or demons (Matt 10:1, 12:43; Mark 1:26, 6:7; Luke 4:33, 6:18). Yet it does refer, at times,

⁹¹ Hock has taken the liberty of translating the pronoun αὐτῆς into "the child's lips" based on the feminine gender of the pronoun, which has proved problematic for the traditional translation of "it" as a reference to her bedroom. His argument is also based on de Strycker's observation (*La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 91 n. 3), that Anna was closely monitoring Mary's diet. I have left the translation of the pronoun simply as "it" because doing so conveys the sense of a careful monitoring of everything and anything that came into contact with Mary, not simply what passed through her lips.

⁹² Most times that the word *κοινός* is used in the LXX, it translates into טה or טהור. In the NT, *κοινός* is used 11 times in terms of ritual impurity (e.g., Mark 7:2, 7:5; Acts 10:14, 10:15, 10:28, 11:8; Rom 14:15 (3x); Heb 10:29; Rev 21:27).

⁹³ In every instance that *άκαθαρτος* is used in the LXX (approx. 137 times), it is used in reference to the laws of ritual impurity – i.e., to qualify certain foods, acts, diseases, bodily flows, etc., as rendering one impure, unclean, or defiled (see esp. Lev 11–15). In the NT, *άκαθαρτος* occurs 24 times (see below).

to ritual purity in other NT writings, such as the Pauline Epistles (1 Cor 7:14; 2 Cor 6:17), Revelation (18:2), and Acts (10:14, 28; 11:8).

Of the NT parallels, perhaps most notable is the discussion of Gentile impurity in Acts 10–11, where the terms *άκαθαρτος* and *κοινός* are paired, as in *Prot. Jas.* 6:4. Most intriguing is the occurrence of this pairing in the context of debates on Gentile impurity; here, Peter is told by means of a vision to spread the message that what was once deemed "profane and unclean," the Lord has now made clean (Acts 10:14, 10:28, 11:8). This command includes not only dietary laws but also contact with Gentiles. The *Protevangelium of James*' concern for precisely the distinctions of ritual purity rejected in Acts 10–11 may suggest an author and/or audience concerned with keeping the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles intact.⁹⁴

Within the narrative, the *Protevangelium of James*' pairing of these terms effectively summarizes the impurities that Mary avoids because of Anna's arrangements for her manner of living, eating, and so on. This avoidance of impurity even extends to her companions. Anna only allows the "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews" (θυγατέρας τῶν Ἐβραίων τὰς ἀμιάντους) to keep her company and amuse her (*Prot. Jas.* 6:5). The term *ἀμιάντος* is also noteworthy since it is repeated five more times throughout the narrative. On two occasions the text refers to the "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews" (*Prot. Jas.* 6:5; 7:4); the term is also used to describe the "undefiled virgins from the tribe of David" (τὰς παρθένους τὰς ἀμιάντους ἀπὸ τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυΐδ) in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2, as well as Mary's condition as "pure (*ἀμιάντος*) before God" in *Prot. Jas.* 10:4. On one additional occasion, this term describes not a person, but an object: "undefiled (*ἀμιάντος*)" threads are used for the Temple veil in *Prot. Jas.* 10:7.

The term *ἀμιάντος* occurs five times in the OT apocrypha and three times in NT literature. There, the term is employed either as a specific reference to virgins or virginity (Wis 3:13; 8:20; Heb 13:4) or in the context of ritual purity (e.g., abstaining from the impure; Wis 4:2; 2 Macc 14:36; 15:34; Heb 7:26; 1 Pet 1:4).⁹⁵ The *Protevangelium of James* may here draw on both meanings. The reader may be meant to understand Mary's companions as sexually pure in the sense of being virginal – the feature that later becomes most characteristic of Mary herself. But, just as Mary's home is free from anything *άκαθαρτος* and *κοινός*, so her companions

⁹⁴ The rejection of the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in Acts is upheld at least in terms of ritual purity laws. Note how in Acts 15 and 21, the perspective is exactly to uphold the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

⁹⁵ Cf. discussion of the related term *μιαίνω* in Chapter Three.

may also be “undefiled” in the broader ritual sense of the term, which may include, in particular, menstrual purity.

When we read *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 in terms of the text’s own concern for the Temple and ritual purity rather than only through the lens of later Christian views of Mary, the more plausible interpretation may be to understand Mary’s companions as “undefiled,” not just by virtue of being virginal, but also by virtue of not associating with Mary during the period of their own menstruation: following this reading, the reference to their undefiled status would evoke the earlier reference to Anna’s post-partum purification in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, wherein the intention is also to keep the infant Mary away from the ritual impurities of blood-flow.⁹⁶

But what does it mean that Mary is set apart in this fashion? On one level, the description of Anna’s concern to maintain the ritual and sexual purity of her daughter recalls her vow to dedicate her child as a “gift” (*δῶρον*) to God in *Prot. Jas.* 4:2. In a sense, she thus sacrifices her child to God. Indeed, Mary is described in language associated with the sacrificial gift, precisely as the narrator describes the extraordinary precautions taken by her mother to prepare her child to be a pure gift to God at His Temple.

On Mary’s first birthday, the people of Israel honour Anna and Joachim for their success in producing an offspring (*Prot. Jas.* 6:6). In response, Joachim decides to give a great banquet in Mary’s honour, using language that parallels Abraham’s announcement to throw a great feast on the day Isaac is weaned (Gen 21:8).⁹⁷ This occasion marks the second time in the narrative we encounter the Temple and its priests. Earlier, when Anna describes in her lament the ill treatment she believes she received for being childless (i.e., thrust out of the Temple of the Lord), the narrative implies that those associated with the Temple have mistaken the righteous Joachim and Anna for sinners (*Prot. Jas.* 3:3).⁹⁸ At the party, however, the high

⁹⁶ The suggestion that Mary’s female companions are not only sexually but also ritually pure and therefore menstrually pure is of particular significance especially in light of my discussion on the term *μαίνω* in the next chapter as it relates specifically to the events that unfold when Mary is asked to leave the Temple at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4.

⁹⁷ The parallel is almost exact except Joachim’s name replaces Abraham’s. Compare LXX Gen 21:8 καὶ ἐποίησεν Ἀβραὰμ δοχὴν μεγάλην and *Prot. Jas.* 6:6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἰωακεῖμ δοχὴν μεγάλην.

⁹⁸ At *Prot. Jas.* 1:5, Reubel reproaches Joachim for offering gifts first because of his childlessness, but it is not clear that Reubel is a Temple priest or associated closely with the Temple. Although some MSS attribute this role to Reubel, scholars such as Hock and W. Michaelis suggest that it is more likely that Reubel was simply a farmer with many children (Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 33 n. 1:5; Michaelis, *Die Apokryphen Schriften zum Neuen Testament* [Bremen: Carl Schünemann, 1958], 92). In my opinion, Reubel is indeed a priest given the emphasis placed on the Temple displayed throughout the narrative and his acute knowledge of the law that forbids Joachim from sacrificing first. Smid

priests, priests, scribes, elders, and all the people of Israel are said to be present, celebrating Mary’s birth together with her parents. This communal celebration highlights the reversal of their previous mistake and their subsequent ready acceptance of Joachim, Anna, and the miraculously-born Mary.⁹⁹

The acceptance of the priests, in particular, is reinforced by the fact that Mary is blessed twice throughout the night: first by the priests, when she is presented to them (*Prot. Jas.* 6:7), and then a second time by the high priests in particular (*Prot. Jas.* 6:9).¹⁰⁰ In the first blessing, the priests “give her a name renowned forever among all generations” (*Prot. Jas.* 6:7; καὶ δὸς αὐτῇ ὄνομα ὄνομαστὸν αἰώνιον εὐ πάσαις ταῖς γενεαῖς), which receives a response from all the people of “so be it, Amen” (*Γένοιτο, ἀμήν*; *Prot. Jas.* 6:8).¹⁰¹ The seeming oddity of this first blessing’s request that God “give her a name” when Anna has already chosen the name Mary for her child may not come as such a surprise when we note that the hands of those associated with the Temple perform the “renaming” and blessing of Mary. In light of Anna’s promise to God to dedicate Mary to the Temple in *Prot. Jas.* 4:2, Mary already “belongs” more to the Temple than to her parents. The reader is reminded that Anna and Joachim function as temporary caretakers for Mary, who must protect her purity so she will remain fit to serve the Lord.

The second blessing, made by the high priests, asks God to “look on this child and bless her with the ultimate blessing, one which cannot be

argues that “*ho archiereus* was added later in explanation” and that Reubel “held no priestly office” originally. But if I am correct that Reubel is in fact a priest, his dismissal of Joachim would represent the first negative encounter with those associated with the Temple. Given that the priesthood and Temple are seen in a positive light in the *Protevangelium of James*, the author’s omission of Reubel’s priestly identity may serve as a way to prevent tarnishing the view of the priests as good.

⁹⁹ This positive view of Jewish priests, scribes, and elders stands in sharp contrast with the negative portrayal of Jewish leaders in the NT Gospels. See e.g., Sjef van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); Michael J. Cook, *Mark’s Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); Anthony J. Saldaire, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989); Donald A. Carson, “The Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Re-appraisal,” *JETS* 25.2 (1982): 161–74; Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict Between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” *CBQ* 49.1 (1987): 57–73; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization,” *JBL* 108.2 (1989): 259–81.

¹⁰⁰ The theme of Mary’s blessedness also occurs in the NT Gospels. The Gospel of Luke is the most explicit in referencing Mary as blessed: “Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you” (1:28); “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God” (1:30); “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (1:42); “Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (1:48).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Matt 27 when it is “all the people” *λαός* who reject Jesus.

surpassed" (ἐπίβλεψον ἐπὶ τὴν πάιδα ταύτην καὶ εὐλόγησον αὐτὴν ἐσχάτην εὐλογίαν ἥτις διαδοχὴν οὐκ ἔχει; *Prot. Jas.* 6:9). The language of this blessing explicitly foreshadows Mary's future role as the mother of Jesus; significantly, Mary is granted high priestly blessing and consent. The response of "So be it, Amen!" by all the people reconfirms that the entire Jewish nation stands as witnesses to Mary's special blessedness.¹⁰²

After receiving the double blessing, Mary is taken up to her bedroom-turned-sanctuary by Anna, who gives her breast to the child and then sings a song in thanks: "I will sing a holy song to the Lord my God because he has visited me and taken away the reproach of my enemies" (*Prot. Jas.* 6:11). The reference to "reproach" (οὐειδισμός) reminds the reader of Anna's initial inability to have children, her experience of being reviled by even her maid servant (*Prot. Jas.* 2:6), and banishment from the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 3:3). Accordingly, her song recalls her lament in the garden (*Prot. Jas.* 3:2–8).

This time, however, the song's tone is exactly the opposite; Anna rejoices over the success of her pregnancy and the gift and blessing she has been given by God:¹⁰³ "And the Lord my God gave me the fruit of his righteousness, single but manifold before him." The statement that Mary has come from the "fruit of his righteousness" (καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ; *Prot. Jas.* 6:12) is also significant. Righteousness begets righteousness, and in return for Joachim's pious participation in the Temple cult and unshaken devotion to God, Anna has been blessed with a child from the "fruit of his righteousness." As πρᾶγμα/δικαιοσύνη is a term strongly associated with Abraham,¹⁰⁴ the intention may be to draw further parallels between Mary and Isaac, particularly with regard to their roles as sacrificial gifts and to their status as blessed (cf. *Gen* 22).¹⁰⁵ As the narrative

¹⁰² Compare the blessings given to Mary in *Luke* 1:42–44 by her relative Elizabeth: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (*Luke* 1:42); "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (*Luke* 1:44). In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary is given blessings while she is a child, whereas in *Luke*, the blessings are given to her when she herself has a child in her own womb.

¹⁰³ The reference to God taking away Anna's disgrace (ἀφεῖλεν ἀπ' ἔμου ὄνειδι οὐμὸν) in *Prot. Jas.* 6:11 may be meant to recall Rachel's statement about God taking away her reproach (ἀφεῖλεν ὁ θεός μου τὸ ὄνειδος) upon the birth of her son Joseph in *LXX Gen* 30:23 as well as the removal of disgrace endured by Elizabeth among her people (ἀφελεῖν ὄνειδός μου ἐν ἀνθρώποις) at the birth of her son John in *Luke* 1:25.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. R.W.L. Moberly, "Abraham's Righteousness (Genesis 15.6)," in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (ed. John A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 103–30.

¹⁰⁵ On the reception history of the sacrifice of Isaac in Jewish and Christian literature, Ed Noort's and Eibert Tigchelaar's volume offers a good collection of essays on the top-

of the *Protevangelium of James* unfolds, the author makes clear that God has given Mary to Anna and Joachim as a gift for their righteousness; yet it is also in their righteousness that they must offer Mary as a gift (δῶρον) back to Him.

The reader is again reminded of their promise to do so upon the arrival of Mary's second birthday. Anna and Joachim discuss whether or not they should take Mary to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:1), and finally decide to wait until she is three years old before dedicating her to God (*Prot. Jas.* 7:2–3).¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the impetus for bringing Mary to the Temple is based on the idea that she is a "gift" for God: "Let us take her up to the Temple of the Lord, in order that we may fulfill the promise we made; lest the Lord send [some evil] upon us and our gift be unacceptable" (Ἀνάξωμεν αὐτὴν ἐν ναῷ κυρίου· πως ἀποδώμεν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν ἣν ἐπηγγειλάμεθα, μήπως ἀποστείλῃ ὁ δεσπότης ἐφ' ημᾶς καὶ ἀπρόσδεκτον ἔσται τὸ δῶρον ημῶν; *Prot. Jas.* 7:1). Here, Joachim is quite clear that Mary has been brought up in order to fulfill the promise that Anna made to God, reinforcing the idea that their daughter belongs

ic. Of particular interest is Florentino García Martínez's study, "The Sacrifice of Isaac in 4Q225," which examines the retelling of the *Genesis* 22 story and argues that 4Q225 belongs neither to the *Jubiliees* nor to the *qumranic* traditions, but that it may function as a witness to the development and growth of the tradition not only within the wider context of Judaism but also that it contains the existence of basic Christian interpretations already present in pre-Christian Judaism. Martínez makes note that it is Isaac who takes on the essential role and that it is he and not Abraham who receives the blessing, thus reinforcing a stronger connection between Isaac and Mary as blessed sacrifices; Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations* (TBN 4; Leiden: Brill, 2002), esp. 44–57.

¹⁰⁶ Horner has argued for the significance of the reference to Mary turning three years of age based on his re-examination of the *Protevangelium of James* and its parallels to *halakhot* in the *Mishnah*. Specifically, Horner concludes that Mary's move to the Temple at the age of three corresponds to the age at which, according to *m. Nid.*, a girl is considered a *Ketannah* and therefore vulnerable to defilement (i.e., sexually) since her hymen can no longer regenerate, a privilege granted only to girls younger than three years of age; Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 321.¹⁰⁶ Glancy has challenged Horner's reading of the significance of waiting for Mary to turn the age of three so that the priests can vouch for her virginity, arguing instead that a more straightforward explanation can be found by looking to Hannah's dedication of her son Samuel to the temple as a model – like Hannah, Anna's hesitation is more easily explained by her desire to wait until her daughter is properly weaned. While I agree with Glancy that a more straightforward explanation can be found in Anna's decision to wean her daughter, I contend that what continues to make Horner's argument convincing is that the age of three is interpreted in light of the narrative concern for Mary turning the age of twelve. In this way, both the age of three and twelve are more meaningfully interpreted in this narrative in light of mishnaic ideas on the division of the female life-cycle; *Corporal Knowledge*, 109–110.

See my discussion of the significance of Mary turning three and twelve years of age in Chapter Three.

more to God and specifically the Temple than to themselves. He fears, moreover, that the “Lord will be angry” and that their “gift will be unacceptable.” In other words, Mary’s parents are described as being concerned, above all, with completing their vow and thus maintaining their personal righteousness as well as contributing to the maintenance of Israel’s covenantal obligations.

Joachim’s reference to Mary as a “gift” (*δῶρον*) picks up on the language used of Joachim’s sacrificial offerings in *Prot. Jas.* 7:1 as well as Anna’s initial vow in *Prot. Jas.* 4:2. At the beginning of the narrative, Joachim is described twice as offering proper sacrifices to the Lord, the same term used to indicate both offerings (*Prot. Jas.* 1:2; 5:1). This language choice is in keeping with the use of the term *δῶρον* in the LXX. In LXX Leviticus and Numbers alone, the term is used 81 times,¹⁰⁷ all in relation to sacrificial offerings. When providing instructions on how to prepare various kinds of sacrificial offerings, both Leviticus and Numbers often use the term *ἄμεινος* (“unblemished”) to describe the manner in which the gifts should be made ready.¹⁰⁸ However, some instances occur when the term *καθαρός* (“pure”) is used in association with sacrificial gifts.¹⁰⁹ While there is no single or simple term used for sacrifice or the various forms of rituals that are prescribed in the Hebrew Bible, the most common choice used in the LXX is *θυσία*. This term is used 378 times in the LXX, translates as “sacrifice; meat offering,” and is the preferred translation for both Levitical *זבב* (zebah) and *מִנְחָה* (minhah).¹¹⁰ In Greek religion,

¹⁰⁷ I.e., 42 times in LXX Leviticus and 39 times in LXX Numbers. It is used 175 times total in the LXX and OT Apocrypha.

¹⁰⁸ The term *δῶρον* is also used to mean sacrifice or is associated with sacrifice in LXX Gen 4:4, Deut 12:11, 1 Chr 16:29, Neh 13:31, Job 20:6, Sir 7:9, Isa 18:7, 66:20, Jer 40 (33):1. In Matt 5:23, 5:24, 8:4, 23:18, 23:19, *δῶρον* is used by Jesus to explain or make reference to the laws concerning making sacrifices and offerings on the altar for the Lord.

¹⁰⁹ In Gen 8:20 this connection is especially noteworthy in that the burnt offerings involve clean birds and animals. LXX Num 19:9 (on the red heifer rite), Lev 4:12 (on purification offerings) and Lev 6:11 (on burnt offerings) all employ the word *καθαρός* in the sacrificial process; in these three cases, the ashes of the sacrificial gift are required to be disposed of by a clean person and into a clean place. See also LXX Lev 14:4, 49 (on purification of lepers) where *καθαρός* is also used to refer to the clean birds that are sacrificed in the purification ritual used to cleanse lepers.

¹¹⁰ Other less common terms used to render the meaning “sacrifice” in the LXX include: *θυμίαμα* (82 times) (incense; fragrant stuffs or spices, perfumes; to offer by way of incense); and *θῦμα* (16 times) (sacrifice; offering); *προσφορά* (14 times) (offering; presenting); *ἱλασμός* (10 times) (expiation; atonement; propitiation; sin-offering); *κάρπωσις* (6 times) (burnt offering; offering made by fire); *σπλαγχνισμός* (3 times) (the eating of internal organs of a sacrificial victim or pagan sacrifices); *σφαγιάζω* (2 times) (to slay or sacrifice); *εἰδωλόθυτος* (2 times) (sacrificed or offered to idols).

θυσία refers to the offering of animals that are slaughtered for sacrifice (portions are burnt for the gods and the rest is shared among participants in a feast). In his study on the Eucharist and sacrifice as ritual meals in early Christianity, Andrew McGowan argues that the Septuagint’s deliberate use of the Greek word, *θυσία*, in its translation of sacrifice within the context of the sacrificial system of Israel, seems to draw a connection between the ritual offerings prescribed in Leviticus and those found in Greco-Roman cults. Noteworthy is the fact that *θυσία*, the most common term used for sacrifice in the LXX and OT Apocrypha, is not used in the *Protevangelium of James*.¹¹¹ Indeed the only word used to render sacrifices and offerings in the narrative is *δῶρον*.

If we read the *Protevangelium of James*’ description of Mary’s childhood with special consideration to the choice of the term *δῶρον* and the ways that it is employed in this narrative, we can discover several new levels of symbolic meaning in the careful manner in which Mary is prepared and protected before she is offered to the Temple: 1. Mary is pure and must have no blemish upon her in order to be fit as an offering to God; 2. Mary’s role as a Temple sacrifice is in no way linked to idol cultic practices.

In *Prot. Jas.* 7:4, the narrative reinforces the themes of ritual purity and sacrificial gift by describing the unusual measures taken to ensure that Mary’s purity is not compromised when she travels between her home and the Temple. Lest she is tempted or unintentionally defiled by anything along the way, Joachim sends for “undefiled daughters of the Hebrews” (*θυγατέρας τῶν Ἐβραίων τὰς ἀμιάντους*; *Prot. Jas.* 7:4). They are described as carrying lamps to prevent Mary from looking back at the life she must leave behind. Even when she is outside of her home-turned-sanctuary, Mary is completely surrounded by the pure; her path is clean and her destination is the Temple. Mary literally transitions from one sacred space to another without any lapse that might subject her to any impurity.

Just as her home was made into a sanctuary, so a sanctuary now becomes her home. At the Temple, Mary is welcomed, kissed, and given another blessing (*Prot. Jas.* 7:7). As noted, Mary has been blessed on two other occasions (*Prot. Jas.* 6:7; 6:9), enhancing the reader’s awareness of the importance of her role and position in the world. The multiplicity of priestly blessings precludes any questioning of this girl’s sojourn in the Temple and, rather, prepares the reader to expect just such a holy space as

¹¹¹ Andrew McGowan, “Eucharist and Sacrifice: Cultic Tradition and Transformation in Early Christian Ritual Meals,” in *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum: Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity* (ed. M. Klinghardt and H. Taussig; TANZ 56; Tübingen: Francke, 2012), 191–206.

appropriate. Only after Mary is blessed three times by priests, in a manner witnessed and accepted by the people of Israel, is she accepted into the Temple.

As with the second blessing (*Prot. Jas.* 6:9), the third blessing foreshadows her role as mother of the messiah: “The Lord God has exalted your name in all generations. In you, upon the end of days, the Lord will reveal his redemption to the children of Israel” (Ἐμεγάλυνεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸ ὄνομά σου ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γενεαῖς. ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν φανερώσει κύριος τὸ λύτρον τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ; *Prot. Jas.* 7:7). This striking language of redemption recalls traditions surrounding child-sacrifice, the redemption of the firstborn,¹¹² and the death and resurrection of the beloved son in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Jewish literature, and NT writings. Jon Levenson has shown how the story of the near-sacrifice of the beloved son Isaac and the story of Jesus, who accepts death according to his Father’s will and is raised to life, can be read in terms of a shared pattern of death and resurrection.¹¹³ More specifically, Levenson argues that child-sacrifice was not eliminated from the worship of the God of Israel, but was rather transformed.¹¹⁴ In this transformation, the *Aqedah*, for instance, was reinterpreted by Second Temple and rabbinic literature so that Isaac was no longer understood as a child victim, but rather a self-sacrificing son who provided redemptive grace to Israel, a role that only becomes further defined and exemplified by the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹¹⁵ Interestingly, Levenson notes in his exploration that the beloved son is marked for both exaltation and humiliation.

In my view, these traditions of child-sacrifice, redemption of the first-born, and death and resurrection of the beloved son also resonate with Mary’s life as it is told in the *Protevangelium of James*. First, Mary is depicted as herself a gift to God – and in language that is strikingly sacrificial: significantly, Mary’s experience as her mother’s Temple offering both

¹¹² In fact, the term used for “redemption” (λύτρον) here is parallel to the term used in LXX Num 3:12, 46, 48, 49, 5 and 18:15 to refer to redemption of the first-born son to the Lord.

¹¹³ Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child-Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). He makes this argument, not only for the binding of Isaac, but also for all the beloved sons in Genesis from Abel to Joseph.

¹¹⁴ See chapter 15 in Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, esp. 218–19.

¹¹⁵ Note that the transformation of child-sacrifice also becomes transformed into ritual practices among both Jews and Christians, i.e., Levenson writes that the tradition behind the death and resurrection of the Beloved Son are often understood to be the origins for the daily lamb offerings (the *temidim*) and the Passover sacrifice in Judaism, and the paschal Eucharist in Christianity; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 174–75.

foreshadows and becomes the foundation for the sacrifice of her own son, Jesus. Second, in her role as her mother’s sacrifice, Mary too will experience exaltation (i.e., as the mother of the Lord), but also humiliation (i.e., she will be accused and publicly tested). Moreover, through this third blessing the *Protevangelium of James* also makes clear its understanding of salvation through Jesus, as resulting in the salvation of Israel as a whole.¹¹⁶ In this way, Mary becomes an active participant in bringing about the redemption of her people.

The narrative continues by describing Mary’s stay in the Temple, again reinforcing her unique nature. Immediately after she is welcomed into this sacred space and blessed for the third time, the narrator reports that the priest sat Mary down on the third step¹¹⁷ of the altar (Καὶ ἐκάθισεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τρίτου βαθμοῦ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 7:9) and that all the house of Israel loved her. The author’s careful emphasis on the love of the people reaffirms her worthiness to live in the Temple, while Mary’s joy serves as a poignant expression of her acceptance of her new life in holy seclusion.

For Oscar Cullmann and J.K. Elliott,¹¹⁸ this passage stands as a sign of the author’s ignorance of Jewish practices; they note that only priests could approach the altar of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.¹¹⁹ When we consider this detail from a literary perspective, however, we might suggest that the intention lies not in accurately recording common Temple practice in pre-70 Judaism, but rather in underscoring Mary’s exceptional nature and her absolute purity. Indeed, precisely because it was not common for

¹¹⁶ This view that Jesus would make salvation possible to the whole of Israel is also expressed in the second century CE by *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. For instance, in *T. Levi* 18:1–11, God’s anointed priest Levi is told by an angel that he will be the agent of redemption by “announcing the one who is about to redeem Israel.” In *T. Benj.* 9:2, God is said to have “sent forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique prophet”; cf. *T. Dan.* 5:10; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Benj.* 4:2. See discussion in M. de Jonge, “The Future of Israel in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*,” *JSJ* 17.2 (1986): 196–211; idem “*The Transmission of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs by Christians*,” *VC* 47. 1 (1993): 1–28.

¹¹⁷ The reference to the “third step” may also be meant to recall the description of the altar in *Ezek* 43:13–17.

¹¹⁸ E.g., J.K. Elliott’s *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 49 and Oscar Cullmann, “The *Protevangelium of James*,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 423–24.

¹¹⁹ On access to the Temple altar, see also Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Services in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 16, 58–76.

women to live in the Temple and have access to the altar,¹²⁰ the text is able to use this detail to emphasize, yet again, that Mary is no ordinary child. At this point in the narrative, Mary's exceptional purity and character have been demonstrated multiple times, and the acceptance and approval of her role in God's plan placed in the mouths of Temple priests as well as the people of Israel. Yet the narrator continues his affirmation of her status within the Temple when he describes how she was "fed there like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of an angel" in *Prot. Jas.* 8:2 (ὡς οἶνος περιστερά νεμομένη καὶ ἐλάμβανε τροφὴν ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλου).¹²¹ Lest the reader be shocked by the image of a female child sitting so near the altar, the appeal to her angelic diet serves to underline her special purity and the divine approval of her dwelling in the Temple.

The image of Mary being fed like a dove (*περιστερά*) merits consideration. First, the reference to the dove seems to strengthen the metaphor of Mary as a sacrificial gift, as doves/turtledoves were the only birds allowed to be offered in sacrifice according to Pentateuchal law. The Greek term *περιστερά*, for instance, occurs ten times in the LXX in the context of Temple sacrifices, rendering the Hebrew גוֹל or גֹּנוֹ. The term *περιστερά* also plays a special role in NT Gospels, where it is associated with innocence (e.g., Matt 10:16) and with the descent of the Holy Spirit (e.g., John 1:32; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22) or Spirit of God (e.g., Matt 3:16) during Jesus' baptism.¹²²

Secondly, being fed by an angel evokes the popular biblical motif of "food of angels" (cf. Exod 16:11-36; Wis 16:20-23) and biblical figures who are granted such heavenly gifts.¹²³ Mary's exchange with the angel at the temple can be interpreted in two ways: 1. Mary is fed human food by a heavenly messenger; or, 2. Mary is fed angelic food by heavenly messengers. The narrative is not clear whether the intention is to the former or latter. Whether Mary is fed human or heavenly food by the angel is un-

¹²⁰ On our evidence for the presence of women in the Temple, refer to Chapter Three.

¹²¹ The comparison of Mary to a dove underscores Mary's absolute purity inasmuch as doves are commonly used to symbolize purity and peace in the NT (cf. Matt 9:6). It may not be coincidental then that the dove also serves, in *Prot. Jas.* 9:6, as the sign that God uses to determine the widower of Israel who is worthy to act as a guardian for Mary. See discussion below.

¹²² Compare the references to the Holy Spirit in the context of Mary in the NT Gospels: "She was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18); "the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:20); "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).

¹²³ E.g., Wis 16:20; Ps. 77:24-25 LXX; LAB 19:5a, 5 Ezra 1:17-19, VitAd 4.2, Rev 2:17b, Jos. Asen. 16:14 for Jewish and Christian parallels.

clear,¹²⁴ but what is made apparent is the narrative's depiction of Mary needing nourishment for her physical body and accomplishing this need by extraordinary means.¹²⁵ If, however, Mary is being fed angelic food by a heavenly messenger, which seems to be the more likely reading since she is repeatedly characterized as exceptional, the effect of her special status is doubly meaningful since it is only in specific and rare times that humans are given such gifts.¹²⁶ In his receptive historical study on the food of angels in Wisdom 16:20-23, Tobias Nicklas traces this theme in various early Jewish rewritings and notes that in the case of Judges 6:11-24, the angel who appears to Gideon refuses to eat the meal prepared for him, but also miraculously turns the meat and bread into a sacrifice since angels either do not eat at all/human food or must only eat heavenly food.¹²⁷ Interestingly, Mary is depicted as participating in special eating rituals involving the digestion of food by the hand of an angel as she is symbolically being represented as a temple sacrifice to the Lord.

Finally, this wonderful scene of Mary fed by angels firmly establishes her acceptance as a holy child residing in a holy space. In fact, once Anna and Joachim offer Mary to the Temple, this is the last we hear of them. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Mary's parents only served as temporary caregivers to their child, whose duties lay solely in the protection of her purity and in preparing her for the role of "Virgin of the Lord."

D. Conclusion

As noted in the Introduction, a number of scholars have stressed the importance of purity for the depiction of Mary in *Protevangelium of James*,

¹²⁴ Cf. T. Levi 8:5, where Levi seems to be fed by an angel; it is unclear whether he is being fed heavenly food or human food.

¹²⁵ Mary's need to eat is in accordance with other physical and fleshy activities attributed to her character including her physical pregnant body and birth pangs at her delivery. Perhaps this description is an intentional response to docetic ideologies. See Chapter Five for the question of doceticism and its influence on our text.

¹²⁶ Nicklas notes that in classical and post-classical Greek literature, the food of Gods is often connected to the theme of immortality and cites Hesiod fr. 23a21; Homer, *Il.* 5,342, *Od.* 5,135; Pindar, *Pyth.* 9,104-106; and Ovid, *Met.* 4,249-251 as examples; "Food of Angels" (Wis 16:20), in *Studies in the Book of Wisdom* (ed. Géza G. Xeravits and Józef Zsengellér; JSJSup 142; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 83-100. Ross Shepard Kraemer also discusses honey and the honeycomb as food of the gods, which was brought forth by the angel and eaten by Aseneth, in Joseph and Aseneth and its connection to immortality; *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169-71.

¹²⁷ Nicklas, "Food of Angels," 84.

but have tended to read this interest in purity in terms of later Christian understandings of female purity, namely, as being interchangeable with virginity and chastity.¹²⁸ When we examine the *Protevangelium of James*' narrative about the events surrounding Anna's conception and the birth and infancy of Mary, however, ritual purity emerges as a central theme. I would like to suggest, more specifically, that the beginning of the narrative can be read in terms of an overarching interest in the Temple and its sacrificial system. Although only few terms related to purity and impurity appear in the early chapters, they occur at critical points in the narrative. In addition, the text establishes purity as an important theme narratively, particularly through the depiction of Mary's relationship to the Temple and its priests, as well as her portrayal as akin to a pure sacrifice in line with the sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus. Moreover, within the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary is consistently located in sacred spaces; even her childhood bedroom is analogous to the Temple in its purity (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4), as is her path to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4–5).

The text's pointed interest in the Temple is clear from the first section of the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1–5:5) that conveys Anna and Joachim as pious and righteous Jews, conforming to the laws and customs of the time, through descriptions of their various interactions with the Temple and with those associated with the Temple cult. As a result, the theme of childbearing emerges early in the narrative as a pious activity and is brought into relation with the Temple and sacrifices. The author affirms this connection on two different levels. First, Anna and Joachim offer the proper sacrifices to atone (*Prot. Jas.* 1:2) and give thanks (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7), both before and after Mary's conception. Second, Anna and Joachim sacrifice what is most important to them: their child, Mary.

Interestingly, the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary as vastly exceeding the ritual purity requirements demanded from any ordinary person. Mary is portrayed as having been protected from even these normal impurities by Anna's efforts (e.g., with respect to her living arrangements and in relation to contact with only undefiled people). Her ability to dwell in the Temple, as well as the priests' acceptance of her sitting in proximity to the altar, serve to suggest that she remained ritually pure at all times, at least as a child. While in the Temple, Mary's continued ritual purity is even ensured by an angel who feeds her heavenly food. The implication is clear: her ritual purity surpasses even that of the Temple priests, who must refrain from approaching the altar at the times when they contract the normal ritual impurities that arise from daily life (*Prot. Jas.* 7:9).

¹²⁸ The *Protevangelium of James*' views on virginity and chastity will be discussed in Chapter Four.

As with the Temple, the role of the priests becomes a central concern for the narrative. Initially, the priests are shown to be incorrect in their interpretation and understanding of certain circumstances. As events unfold, however, the priests are described in an unusually positive fashion, featuring their blessings of Mary as well as their prediction of her future position. The priests, in other words, realize that she is special and fated for a special role in (Jewish) salvation-history. Arguably, in fact, the *Protevangelium of James*' depiction of the child Mary cannot be wholly understood apart from some awareness of biblical and early Jewish ideas about ritual purity.

Specifically, I suggest that this interest in the Temple extends familiarity and concern with the system of ritual purity related to it, particularly as laid out in Leviticus more so than any other view of ritual impurity discussed at the beginning of this chapter. First, the text betrays little interest in Mary's moral purity, providing no evidence that ritual purity is in any way combined with moral impurity as expressed in some sectarian writings. Second, ideas of ritual impurity in the text are conveyed by a concern for the Temple and sacrificial system whereby ritual impurity is reversed precisely through the participation in ritual purification (e.g., Anna's post-partum purification) and Temple sacrifice. Third, the narrative's use of the term δῶρον over the word θυσία in order to denote sacrifice further supports the idea that the concern for ritual purity presented in this text is more closely aligned to those expressed in the sacrificial system found in Leviticus. As noted above, although purity laws concerning the Temple are featured in some rabbinic writings (e.g., *m. Kel* 1.8 and *b. Yoma* 16a discuss women's access to the temple), they are limited to their remembrance of pre-70 Jewish Temple practices, and so ideas relating to purification and cleansing are often interpreted in the context of the Torah, rather than the Temple. This shift from Temple to Torah is clearly not represented in our narrative. In fact, the Temple and the physical practice by our characters of offering sacrifices to achieve ritual purity functions in the narrative as major themes and agents for presenting Mary's purity.¹²⁹ In terms of other Jewish traditions and customs as expressed in the *Protevangelium of James*, however, mishnaic ideas and practices seem to be the most fruitful for providing meaningful interpretation of our text; specifically, the possible references to Yom Kippur and the reason Mary is sent to the Temple at the age of three instead of two.

¹²⁹ While the representation of the Temple and the laws regarding its entrance reflect more closely the ideas presented in Leviticus, there are some kinds of ritual impurity that may be closer to the ideas held by other groups as our discussion of menstrual and sexual purity will show.

In the following chapter, we will consider an important transition in the narrative and explore its implications for the depiction of Mary and the approach to ritual purity in the *Protevangelium of James*. According to the text, Mary's special privilege and access to the Temple changes when she turns twelve years of age and is sent from the protection of the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3–4) into the home of a certain man named Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 9:11). At this pivotal point in the narrative a shift takes place: I will argue that the text maintains its interest in ritual purity and that the Temple and priesthood remain central to the description and elevation of Mary; however, the text's interest in ritual purity becomes articulated in terms of questions about menstrual purity in particular.

Chapter Three

Mary and Menstrual Impurity

A. Introduction

The *Protevangelium of James*' prevailing interest in purity continues as the narrative moves from Mary's childhood to her adolescence. The text's views on menstrual purity/impurity provide further dimensions to Mary's character, especially in light of the focus on ritual purity/impurity as discussed in the last chapter. Specifically, I suggest the concern for Mary's menstrual impurity serves as a signal for her role as a mother, but also as the catalyst for transitioning her role from temple sacrifice to Virgin of the Lord. Additionally, by focusing on menstrual purity/impurity we are able to shed light on the text's interest in and relationship to Judaism. I propose, for instance, that the presentation of Mary's menstrual impurity is aligned closely to mishnaic ideas concerning the female body and the transition from girlhood to womanhood and possibly motherhood, but that the text's views on the impurity of menstrual blood are more closely linked to biblical ideas of impurity. An analysis of these issues will highlight the text's persistent concerns and thus continue to provide hints towards suggesting a likely milieu for our narrative.

B. What is Menstrual Purity/Impurity?

Since menstrual impurity is a type of ritual impurity, the Hebrew Bible is an apt starting point for our survey. Accordingly, this discussion on menstrual purity/impurity will prove helpful for situating our text's views on the topic.

I. Menstrual Purity/Impurity in the Hebrew Bible

What is menstrual purity/impurity? Leviticus provides four important facts about these terms. First, what it is: Lev 15:19 describes menstrual impurity as "when a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body." Second, what it means in the context of purity: Lev 19–20

states that “she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening” and that everything that she lies or sits upon shall also be deemed unclean. Third, what is prohibited when she is in this state: Lev 15:31 tells us that those in this state of impurity must not come in contact with the sacred (i.e., the sanctuary) lest they defile it. Fourth, what she must do to return to a state of purity: although Lev 15:19–23 proscribes that even those who touch her bed or anything upon which she sits must wash their clothes, bathe, and wait until evening in order to return to a state of purity, it is not explicitly stated that she must bathe to return to a state of purity. Thus, after waiting the prescribed time of seven days, a woman may be deemed menstrually pure.

In the *Protevangelium of James*, we know that Mary is raised in the Temple, but is asked to leave at the age of twelve because of the priest’s fear that she may defile it (*Prot. Jas.* 8:4). In accordance with the majority of scholars, I read Mary’s removal from the Temple precinct as the result of her impending menstruation.¹ Therefore, a brief survey of varying purity laws regarding menstrual purity/impurity will focus not only on the different ideas and views held on menstrual impurity by religious groups in ancient Judaism, but also its relationship to the Temple and to the purity laws laid out specifically for menstruants with regard to accessing the sacred. Such analysis will provide a crucial context for understanding the *Protevangelium of James*’ views on purity. As with our investigation into ritual purity, I proceed by first surveying different views held on menstrual impurity and then return to our text for an examination of its specific concerns regarding the issue of Mary’s menstrual purity.

II. Menstrual Purity/Impurity in the Qumran Scrolls

The first selection of texts that I consider to help map the *Protevangelium of James*’ views on menstrual purity/impurity from the Scrolls include the Damascus Document, Temple Scroll, and *Tohorot* (Purities).² Perhaps one of the most complicated questions concerning the Scrolls today is their relationship to one another. As Eileen Schuller succinctly puts it, “Do all these documents pertain to or originate from the same group within Palestinian Judaism?”³ Although this question is important and aims at providing a more comprehensive picture of the Qumran community and its be-

¹ See discussion on this below and the evidence that menstrual impurity is most likely the impurity about which the temple priests seem to be concerned at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4.

² I have selected these three texts because although sometimes difficult to interpret, they provide important clues on how menstrual impurity was viewed and the practices related to this type of impurity.

³ Eileen Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned?* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 86.

liefs and practices, the goal of this survey will be limited to providing a general sense of the views held on menstrual purity/impurity by the Scrolls.

III. The Damascus Document

In the Admonition section of the Damascus Document (CD 4.12–5.11), the author labels sexual intercourse with menstruants as one of the three “nets of Belial,” which are used by the Damascus Document author to distinguish his community from the rest of Judaism who continue to participate in such corrupt practices.⁴ Like biblical law, the Damascus Document author rebukes Jews and priests who have sexual intercourse with menstruants since such an act is linked to sin and results in the defilement of the sanctuary (CD 5.7; cf. 4Q266 6 ii 2). Leviticus, for instance, also asserts that sleeping with a menstruant constitutes a direct violation of the law (Lev 15:24; cf. also Ezek 18:6) and incurs the penalty of *karet*, i.e., God’s divine intervention to “cut off from their people” those who defile themselves by continuing to participate in such abominations (Lev 18:19 and 20:18). Significantly, the polluting power of menstruation in this context (i.e., in conjunction with intercourse) has the ability to defile the temple without actually being physically in it.

Although both Leviticus and the Damascus Document attest to the connection between menstruation and the defilement of the tabernacle/temple,⁵ differences become evident between this text and its biblical and Pharisaic/rabbinic counterparts when we note that the Damascus Document’s purity rules regarding menstrual impurity are almost always stricter. The Damascus Document’s inclusion of sexual relations with a menstruant as one of three ways that distinguishes their community from other Jews seems to indicate the severity of the impurity that menstruation produces. This increase in severity can also be seen in the Damascus Document’s definition of menstrual impurity, which as I discussed in the previous chapter, associates ritual impurity with moral impurity and uses the term *תַּנְהִלָּה* to refer to sinfulness in general.

Given the Damascus Document’s goal to “separate impure from pure and differentiate between holy and common” (CD 12.19–20), its under-

⁴ In CD 4.12–5.11, the author defines his community in contrast to other Jews who are referred to as the “builder of the walls” and are described as corrupt since they are participants in the “three nets of Belial.” Schuller notes that the three nets are not always clear, but that it can be deciphered that the first “net” deals with those who practice improper marriage (i.e., marrying one’s niece); the second net concerns those who remarry and divorce; and the third net refers to the practice of sexual intercourse with menstruants; *What have We Learned?*, 89.

⁵ Cf. rabbinic views on this in more detail below.

standing of menstrual impurity can be interpreted as more stringent than both biblical and rabbinic law since it considers any blood discharged outside the regular seven-day menstrual period to be abnormal.⁶ Thus, the woman who is defined as a menstruant until “many days” outside her normal period by Lev 15:25, at which time she will be deemed a *zabah*, is considered by the Damascus Document to be a *zabah* the moment her seven day period has ended. In other words, *zabah* is an inclusive term used in the Damascus Document to indicate both regular and irregular female discharges; thus, the menstruant is considered a much more impure person in this context (4Q266 6 ii 2–4).⁷

By considering linguistic evidence we discover additional aspects of the Damascus Document’s views on menstrual impurity. Ian Werrett notes from the Damascus Document’s largely restored and extremely fragmented discussion of the *zabah* זָבָה (4Q272 1 ii 7b 17), for instance, that the text seems to use this term only when describing a woman who has experienced a normal bodily discharge; that is, what Leviticus refers to as the *niddah* נִדָּה (Lev 15:19–24).⁸ Additionally, whereas Leviticus does not mention the requirement to bathe after a woman has stopped menstruating, Joseph M. Baumgarten suggests that the possible interpretation of מִקְיָץ דָם as “cessation of the flow of blood” coupled with יְצָר’s close proximity to the references made to “water” (הַמִּים), “waters of sprinkling” (נִדָּה) and “livin[g waters]” (הַמִּים [בְּחֵי]) only a few lines down may indicate a ritual cleansing rite at the end of a woman’s discharge, thus reflecting the Damascus Document’s desire to fill the gap in Leviticus by applying the requirements for a male with an abnormal discharge (Lev 15:13) to a woman with a normal discharge.⁹ Werrett proposes that the desire in the Damascus Document to include a ritual cleansing law for a menstruant (where Leviticus does not), if Baumgarten’s insights are indeed correct, may be linked to the conceptual connection between the loss of certain fluids and death.¹⁰ As Jacob Milgrom argues, “the loss of vaginal blood and

semen, both containing seed, meant the diminution of life and, if unchecked, destruction and death.”¹¹ In other words, if a woman’s menstrual impurity is not cleansed by undergoing a proper purification by water (Baumgarten’s suggestion), the result could be contamination of the land, including the Holy of Holies (Lev 15:31).¹²

Additionally, Cecilia Wassen suggests the likelihood that the fragmentary text of 4Q272 1 ii 7–10 contains clarification on the biblical laws regarding the transmission of impurity by including specific reference to the defiling touch of a menstruant and *zabah*, where Levitical law does not.¹³ The Damascus Document’s more stringent definition of menstrual impurity and its possible reference to an additional step required by the menstruant to return to a state of purity as well as the likelihood of an explicit reference to a menstruant’s or *zabah*’s ability to transmit impurity may indicate that the Damascus Document’s ideas concerning the impurity of a menstruant is more severe than its biblical counterpart. Given that access to the sacred depends heavily on a person’s state of purity, a menstruant, according to the Damascus Document, would have greater difficulty accessing the temple and sacred places since its views of menstrual impurity seem to be stricter than those offered in biblical law above and rabbinic *halakhah*, discussed below.

IV. The Temple Scroll

11QT’s views on menstrual impurity can be discerned from what it does not tell us as much as from what it does. Given that the fundamental principle underlying the Temple Scroll’s purity laws was the maintenance of the sanctity and protection of the Jerusalem Temple and the Israelite cities from contamination, it should not be surprising that menstrual impurity is often discussed in the context of the Temple. For Israelite cities, the 11QT author writes that places of quarantine were built outside the cities for menstruants and parturients, but also those with skin disease and other bodily discharges.¹⁴ Interestingly, no indication is provided about how long those who were quarantined should remain there, nor is any information given about purification procedures for returning to a state of purity. What is reasonable to assume then is that the defiling force of menstruation was deemed so powerful as to necessitate that menstruants be physi-

⁶ Hannah Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 102; Cecilia Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document* (SBLABib 21; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 49–53.

⁷ Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 50.

⁸ Ian Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 52.

⁹ Joseph M. Baumgarten, *Qumran Cave Four XIII: The Damascus Document* (4Q266–273) (DJD 18; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 191. Contra Werrett who argues that although the close word association connection offered by Baumgarten is possible, so too is the likelihood that the references to מִנְדָה are simply meant to be understood in relation to the cleansing of people who made contact with the menstruant and objects that had been contaminated by her (cf. Lev 15:21–22), 54; *Ritual Purity*, 54.

¹⁰ Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 54.

¹¹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 767.

¹² Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 54.

¹³ Lev 15:11 clarifies that a *zav* is defiling, but does not do the same for the *niddah* or the *zabah*; Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 50–51.

¹⁴ Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, cf. 153–54; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 101.

cally removed in order to prevent the contamination of the city and those "in their midst" (11QT 19 48.13–17).¹⁵

The increased severity in 11QT's views of menstrual impurity as they relate to the Temple and the city of Jerusalem is particularly interesting. Like the laws outlined for regular cities, Jerusalem is also specifically given a list of those who should be quarantined. Menstruants and parturients are mentioned again, but interestingly no places outside of Jerusalem are provided for them.¹⁶ Yigael Yadin suggests that since no descriptions of quarantines outside the Jerusalem walls were provided and that sexual intercourse was not permitted in the city, women were probably not allowed to live in the city.¹⁷ B.A. Levine has challenged Yadin, arguing that those who posed the threat of ritual defilement (e.g., the menstruant and women) were only excluded from the *temenos* and the Temple Mount, but not the entire holy city.¹⁸ Lawrence Schiffman argues that it is difficult to imagine that the entire city of Jerusalem was to be free of women, even if, according to Yadin, the Scroll's community was indeed Essene, and that 11QT 40.6 indicates that while women were barred from the Middle Court, they were allowed into the Outer Court.¹⁹ Although the views differ regarding those who were to be excluded from certain areas relating to the "city of the Temple,"²⁰ what seems to be consistent in Yadin's, Levine's, and

¹⁵ Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 154.

¹⁶ Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 154; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 101.

¹⁷ Yigael Yadin, *Temple Scroll I* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and The Shrine of the Book, 1977), 277–85. See also Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis* (SBLDS 143; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 287–88; eadem, *Purity Texts*, 99–103, 136–37, who follows Yadin's assessment. Although the purity laws regarding menstrual impurity may be more severe in 11QT, other bodily fluids pertaining to a man that continue to threaten contamination are argued by Werrett to be less severe. Citing 11QT 19 45.15–17, Werrett argues that the laws concerning those suffering from running issues are the same as they are in biblical law: Lev 15:13 and 11QT 19 45.15–17 both require the person who has been healed to wait seven days and to launder and bathe. The only difference here is that 11QT is specific that the laundering and bathing must take place on the seventh day, whereas Leviticus simply states that it must be done. Leniency on the part of 11QT can be determined given the absence of a requirement that the *zab* must provide two turtle doves or two pigeons to offer as atonement, whereas Lev 15:14–15 demands that this must be done. See Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 155.

¹⁸ B.A. Levine, "The Temple Scroll: Aspects of its Historical Provenance and Literary Character," *BASOR* 232 (1978): 5–23, esp. 14 f. Cf. Milgrom, "'Sabbath' and 'Temple City' in the Temple Scroll," *BASOR* 232 (1978): 25–27 and Yadin, "Is the Temple Scroll a Sectarian Document?," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book* (ed. G.M. Tucker and D.A. Knight; SBLCA; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1980), 153–69, esp. 157–62.

¹⁹ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Courtyards of the House of the Lord: Studies on the Temple Scroll* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 386–87 and 395.

²⁰ Schiffman suggests a solution for the Yadin and Levine debate over the "city of the sanctuary" whereby both are technically correct if one reads 11QT's idea of the camp of

Schiffman's assessment is the belief that women were not allowed near the sacred space of the Temple. Thus we learn of the severe attitudes held towards the defiling power of the menstruant and the desire of the 11QT author to safeguard not only the Temple, but proximities immediately near the Temple (e.g., anywhere beyond the Outer Court for the 11QT author) from the impurity that a menstruant produces.

Importantly, Schiffman reminds us that 11QT is "not a description of an actual cultic rite as practiced in the Jerusalem Temple"²¹ since the temple described in 11QT was idealistic and utopian in nature: designed by God, built by the Israelites in the period before the end of days (11QT 19 29.7–10), but never actually built. Although Werrett is also in agreement with Schiffman's argument on the reality of the Temple in the Scroll, he reminds us that even though these laws regarding menstrual impurity and the Temple may not have been practiced in social reality, these purity laws were not necessarily invalid for the community itself.²² This idea is perhaps most evident in the view that the city of Jerusalem and its temple were seen to embody a higher degree of holiness than other cities; thus, 11QT's view of the impurities that threatened to defile the holy city and temple, such as menstrual impurity, increase in severity as a danger as well.

V. *QTohorot* (Purities)

Although *Tohorot* deals specifically with ritual purification and contamination, its views on menstrual impurity in particular can be found in only a few fragmentary texts. 4Q274 1 i 4–6, for instance, tell us that menstruants are not to mingle with other people during this week of impurity because they will contaminate "the camps of the holy ones of Israel."²³ The contaminating power of a menstruant is not a new concept. Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that in the biblical system of ritual impurity, menstrual blood is to be considered a potent contaminate since it represents death and

Israel as an "ideal structure, a court of the Temple, not a residential area in Jerusalem." For more on this, see *Courtyards of the House of the Lord*, 398–401.

²¹ Schiffman, "Exclusion from the Sanctuary and the City of the Sanctuary in the Temple Scroll," *HAR* 9 (1985): 315 and idem, *Courtyards of the House of the Lord*, 398. See also Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 112.

²² Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 112 and 174. See also Baumgarten's review of Yadin's assessment of the applicability of the Temple Scroll's laws to the existing Jerusalem Temple. Baumgarten argues that there is good reason to believe that certain purity rules (e.g., barring those who have had sexual relations from the "city of the sanctuary" for three days) described by 11QT were applied by the sect to contemporary Jerusalem, even if they continue to believe that its Temple and priesthood were tainted; "Review of Yadin's Temple Scroll," *JBL* 97 (1978): 588.

²³ Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 102–3.

is in opposition to life, and therefore God.²⁴ What is an innovation on the part of *Tohorot* is the level of contamination a menstruant's impurity produces compared to a *zabah*. Hannah Harrington argues that *Tohorot* homogenizes the contamination level of a menstruant with that of the *zabah* since 4Q274 1 i 7–8 interprets the blood of menstruation to be like the flux and the one touching it. In Leviticus, the *zabah* was considered to be a significantly more severe kind of impurity than the *niddah*.²⁵ If *Tohorot* indeed suggests that the contamination level of a menstruant is equivalent to that of a *zabah*, then it, like the Damascus Document and the Temple Scroll, seems to present for the most part a view of menstrual impurity as a more potent impurity than its biblical and rabbinic counterparts.

VI. Rabbinic Literature

Generally speaking, rabbinic laws concerning ritual impurity have often been interpreted as taking a middle position between biblical and Qumranic legislation: they are often more lenient in their rules than the Scrolls, but either on par or more stringent than the biblical laws. Rabbinic views on menstrual impurity, however, are almost always more rigorous than the Hebrew Bible and can be interpreted as either on par with the Scrolls or slightly more or less rigorous. Jonathan Klawans attributes this stringency to the selective focus and treatment of menstrual impurity in the mishnah (tractate *Niddah*) and the talmuds, whereby an enormous amount of intellectual and spiritual energy has been devoted to understanding the menstruant and her impurity.²⁶

Perhaps where this severity on the part of the rabbis becomes most apparent is in its prominent deviation from biblical law concerning the bloodstains of a menstruating woman as discussed in tractate *Niddah*. Leviticus 15 makes no distinction between blood types or where or when it is found on the menstruant. The only distinction Leviticus makes is when blood is found when a woman is menstruating and when she is not men-

²⁴ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 401.

²⁵ Harrington notes, however, that the comparison of blood and flux can probably only be applied to the contamination power of the discharge and that other restrictions concerning the *zabim* may not have necessarily been applied to the menstruant. For instance, whereas the *zabim* are forbidden from the camp (Num 5:2) and their time of purification does not begin until their fluxes stop and a sacrifice must be offered at the end of that week (Lev 15:29), the menstruant is not forbidden from the camp and her time of purification begins with the first day of her bleeding (Lev 15:19); *Purity Texts*, 102–3.

²⁶ Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104.

struating; in other words, menstrual impurity is based on a time line.²⁷ As Charlotte E. Fonrobert has argued, the purpose of mishnaic and especially talmudic discussions on blood types is to distinguish between blood that is issued from a woman's body (i.e., blood flow) and blood that is found on her clothes and/or body (i.e., bloodstain whose origins is unknown). Simply put, not all blood is menstrual blood and it is important to distinguish between the two to determine ritual purity (non-menstrual blood present) or ritual impurity (menstrual blood present).²⁸

Citing the story of rabbi Akiva's declaration of a woman with a blood-stain as pure (*m. Nid* 8.3), Judith Hauptman interprets rabbi Akiva's distinction between blood flow (unclean) and bloodstain (possibly clean) as a lenient decision since it appears to limit cases of menstrual impurity only to those who are accurately identified as menstrually impure and not to every woman who may find blood on her body or clothes.²⁹ Also writing from a feminist perspective, Fonrobert rightly notes, however, that rabbi Akiva's story and decision, whether lenient or not, is still about a woman who must go to a rabbi to get his "expert" opinion about whether her bloodstain constitutes placing her in a state of ritual purity or impurity.³⁰ Fonrobert interprets the laws of *Niddah* in terms of power and knowledge over women's bodies, which, as the complicated systems concerning blood colour, texture, shape, and locations offered by the rabbis suggest, belong to the rabbis over and above the women themselves.³¹ While Fonrobert's conclusions are framed by her questions surrounding gender construction, they effectively point out that the rigidity of rabbinic ideas concerning menstrual impurity is apparent in the very fact that an entire thoroughly detailed tractate is devoted to attempting to determine when a woman is in a state of menstrual impurity.

The laws regarding the ritual purification of a menstruant furthers this position. Although *m. Miqw* 8.1, 5 requires the menstruant to bathe only after her week of impurity and not bathe and launder her clothes as specified in 4Q514 5–6, it is still more stringent in its requirement than biblical law where no ritual ablution is required at all for a menstruant to return to a state of purity (Lev 15:19).³²

²⁷ Charlotte E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 104–5.

²⁸ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 105.

²⁹ Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998), 158; 153, on her section entitled "Akiva's Intentional Leniencies."

³⁰ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 103–27.

³¹ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 108–9 on blood colour; 112–15 on bloodstain, etc.

³² This severity is also evident even in the definition of a menstruant. If we compare the rabbinical definition and the laws that describe when this state of impurity falls into the more severe ritual impurity category of *zabah*, for instance, rabbinical law is less

Mishnaic literature pertaining to the menstruant may possibly be as stringent as the Scrolls in its view that women should be secluded during this time of impurity. The isolation of menstruants in rabbinic literature has been hotly debated among scholars and is centered on the reference to בֵּית הַטְמָאָה in *m. Nid* 7.4 which, depending on how it is vocalized, means either “house of impurities” or “house of impure women.”³³ Shaye J.D. Cohen,³⁴ E.P. Sanders³⁵ and Jacob Neusner³⁶ argue that too much emphasis has been placed on *m. Nid* 7.4 without clear evidence for the isolation of menstruants from society. Although Klawans does not refute Cohen’s claims, he readily admits that the *m. Nid* 7.4 reference is “hardly unambiguous,” and acknowledges that rabbinic literature assumes menstruants will stay at home and continue their domestic duties; he also argues that at “different times, and in various places, the concern for menstrual impurity has led some Jewish communities to demand the physical isolation of the menstruant and even her exclusion from the synagogue” and to assume that these “practices did not develop over time is naïve.”³⁷

VII. Early Christian Sources

The idea that menstrual blood is incompatible with sacred spaces (i.e., the Temple) is widely attested not only in early Jewish sources, but Christian ones as well, as exemplified in Luke 2:21–24, which gives a description of Mary acting in accordance to the Law that forbids her entrance into the sa-

stringent than the 11QT, but more stringent than Leviticus. According to the later *Sifra mesora zabim* on *parah* 5.9, a menstruant does not fall into the category of *zabah* until she has had abnormal menstruation for at least three successive days, whereas 4Q266 6 ii 2–4, as mentioned above, defines a menstruant as a *zabah* any time after her regular seven day period; Lev 15:25 says that this switch in categories takes place after “many days.”³⁸

³³ See Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis*, 170–71, n.7 and Harrington, *Impurity Systems*, 271.

³⁴ Shaye J.D. Cohen has argued that stringencies placed on menstruants, such as isolation and access to the sacred, are medieval in origin and thus cannot be traced back to these ancient sources. He suggests specifically that the earliest Jewish text (post 70 CE) that prohibits menstruants from coming into contact with the sacred is the sixth or seventh century text *Beraita de Nidda*. For further details on this argument, see “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 278. Cohen’s conclusions on the sanctity of the synagogue have been questioned by a number of scholars. See discussion in Chapter Five.

³⁵ E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM, 1990), 156.

³⁶ Jacob Neusner, *Purity in Rabbinic Judaism, A Systematic Account: The Sources, Media, Effects, and Removal of Uncleanliness* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 115.

³⁷ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 104.

cred space of the Temple after she is identified as being in a state of ritual impurity (e.g., post-partum). Although Christ-believing communities in antiquity did not find it necessary to precisely define menstrual impurity or the menstruant herself for that matter, we know that various groups that identified themselves as Christ-believing practiced the isolation of menstruants from the sacred. That such communities turned to Judaism and Leviticus in particular to help interpret the menstruant as impure should not be surprising. In accordance with Cohen, Joan Branham argues that the early church’s reinterpretation and appropriation of temple sacred space resulted in the specific incompatibility of sacrificial blood (i.e., the Eucharist) with reproductive blood (menses) inasmuch as Christianity regarded its ritual, institutions, and clergy as the permanent replacements of the Jerusalem temple.³⁸ In order to position the *Protevangelium of James*’ views of purity on the purity map more accurately, the three earliest Christian references to the seclusion of menstruants from the sancta will be discussed briefly below. As it happens, they all were written in the third century CE.

VIII. The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus

Written in Rome around 215 CE when he was a presbyter of the Roman church, Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* attempts to preserve second century liturgical and church practices including instructions on the ordination of bishops, elders, and deacons as well as the appointment of widows and the training of catechumens. Important for our studies is Hippolytus’ direction that female catechumens who are menstruating on the day they are to be baptized are required to choose another day for this ceremony and be separated from the other catechumens (*Trad. ap.* 20.6).³⁹ Since Hippolytus does not explain this rule and, as Cohen points out, there is no rabbinic parallel to this law, it is not illogical to interpret Hippolytus’ rule as based on the Levitical law that deems menstruants impure and therefore unfit to make contact with the sacred because of the possibility of defilement.⁴⁰

³⁸ Joan Branham, “Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces,” *HDB* 30.4 (Spring 2002): 15–22; *eadem* “Blood in Flux, Sanctity at Issue,” *RESAA* 31 (Spring 1997): 53–70. On the belief that menstrual blood defiles and is incompatible with sacred spaces continued long into the Middle Ages and beyond, see Albert Demyttenaere, “The Cleric, Women, and the Stain,” in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1990), 144–65 and Charles T. Wood, “The Doctor’s Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought,” *Spec* 56.4 (1981): 710–27.

³⁹ Gregory Dix, *The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus* (London: SPCK, 1937; repr. 1968), 32.

⁴⁰ Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 288.

IX. The Letter of Dionysius of Alexandria

Written from Alexandria, Dionysius, a disciple of Origen and bishop whose opinions carried great weight especially in Eastern Christendom, comments strictly on the menstruant women being in contact with holy spaces:

Concerning women in their menstrual separation whether it is right for them in such a condition to enter the house of God, I think it unnecessary even to inquire. For I think that they, being faithful and pious, would not dare in such a condition either to approach the holy table or to touch the body and blood of Christ (*Patrologia Graeca* 10.1281).

For Dionysius the blood of a menstruant is simply incompatible with the sacrificial blood of Christ. Using the story of the woman with a twelve-year flow, Dionysius explains why a menstruant should not enter “the house of God,” “the holy table,” or the “body and blood of Christ” since even she “touched not him but only his fringe” (*Patrologia Graeca* 10.1281–2).⁴¹ Cohen claims that “the transference of temple terminology to the church is unmistakable” since the menstruant’s ban from the altar and thus participation in communion, the sacrifice, is essentially the same restriction placed on the menstruant regarding accessing the holy and the holy of holies.⁴² What is interesting about Dionysius’ interpretation of the woman with the twelve-year flow of blood is that he conflates the idea of a *zabah* with a menstruant – neither one should touch the temple replacement – i.e., the body of Christ, the Eucharist, the sacrifice. Comparatively, Dionysius’ understanding of menstrual impurity may be interpreted as the most severe since he draws no distinction between the impurity of the menstruant and the much more severe impurity of the *zabah*, for which even Leviticus differentiates. Interestingly, his severity also translates to other pollution categories as expressed in Leviticus 15; following his explanation of the woman with the twelve year flow of blood, Dionysius also recommends that married people abstain from sexual intercourse prior to engaging in prayer and discusses nocturnal emissions as pollution. In this way, Dionysius’ understanding of menstrual purity may not be too far from the ideas found in the sectarian writings of Qumran.

X. Didascalia Apostolorum (DA)

Written in Syria, this document describes a polemic against the observance of menstrual separation as well as a number of other Jewish practices including the Sabbath, dietary regulations, and purity laws. On menstrual

separation, the DA author also uses the woman with the twelve year flow of blood to discuss the rule regarding menstruant woman, but ironically does so for the opposite position expressed by Dionysius. The DA author writes:

On this account then...you shall now separate those [women] who have their period. For she also who had the discharge of blood, when she touched the border of our Savior’s cloak, was not censured but was even esteemed worthy for the forgiveness of all her sins. And when [your wives have] those issues which are according to nature, take care, as it is right, that you cleave to them, for you know that they are your limbs, and love them as yourselves ... On this account, a woman when she is in the way of women, and a man when an issue comes forth from him, and a man and his wife when they have conjugal intercourse and rise up one from another – let them assemble without restraint, without bathing, for they are clean. (Vööbus, 244–245).

In light of the comments made on seminal emissions and marital relations, in addition to the main concern on whether menstruants should be separated, the DA author’s concerns seem to reflect the same issues (these three exact categories are discussed) expressed in Dionysius’ letter, but of course, with the opposite intentions. Uniquely, the argument to continue the practice of menstrual separation is made by the women themselves against the DA author. Interestingly, the DA women believe they are void of the Holy Spirit (which they received at baptism) during their seven days of impurity.⁴³ The argument to continue to observe menstrual separation by these women will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five, especially as it may help in establishing a possible provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*, but for the purpose of understanding the DA’s views of purity, it will suffice to say that Jewish purity laws were still extremely influential in Christ-believing communities even in the third century since the women are clear that they abstain from prayer, the Eucharist, and Scripture study precisely because these actions are considered holy, and hence should not be done in a state of ritual impurity.

With this general overview of the more significant ideas held on menstrual impurity let us now turn to the *Protevangelium of James* and its presentation of ritual impurity in order to situate its position on the “purity map.”

C. The View of Menstrual Purity/Impurity

The *Protevangelium of James*’ description of the events surrounding Mary’s departure from the Temple hint at the onset of ritual impurity at the

⁴¹ Charles L. Feltoe, *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 102–3.

⁴² Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 288–89.

⁴³ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 172–79.

age of twelve, particularly in a key verse, *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, which I argue alludes to Mary's menstruation. This verse serves as a pivot in the narrative, signalling an important transition in the depiction of both Mary and the Temple. A literary analysis of *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 and the resulting depiction of Mary as susceptible to menstrual impurity will reveal additional facets of her characterization in the text as a whole, particularly in light of the previous focus on her ritual purity. Throughout this chapter, laws about the female life-cycle in the Pentateuch and Mishnah will be used to illuminate this important detail in the *Protevangelium of James*.

I. Does Mary Menstruate? The Problem of *Prot. Jas* 8:4

Above, we noted how the first half of *Prot. Jas.* 8:1 depicts Mary's parents as leaving her at the Temple, at which point they disappear from the narrative. Their role in the story is complete upon the deliverance of their child to this holy place, and their departure thus serves to highlight the appropriateness of Mary's new home. In the second half of *Prot. Jas.* 8:1, moreover, it is noted that Mary does not even look back at them.

Directly after this description, however, the narrative suddenly shifts forward to a time nine years later, which is worth quoting in full here:

8:3 When she was twelve years old, there took place a council of the priests, saying, "Behold, Mary has become twelve years old in the Temple of the Lord. ⁴⁴ What, therefore, shall we do with her lest she defile the sanctuary of the Lord, our God?"

8:3 Γενομένης δὲ αὐτῆς δωδεκαετοῦς, συμβούλιον ἐγένετο τῶν ἱερέων λεγόντων· Ἰδού Μαρία γέγονεν δωδεκαετὴς ἐν τῷ ναῷ κυρίου. ⁴⁵ Τί οὖν αὐτὴν ποιήσωμεν, μήπως μιάνη τὸ ἀγίασμα κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν;

Scholars have read these words as a reference to the onset of menstruation.⁴⁴ The precise cause of the potential pollution, however, is never stated outright in the text.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is the lack of any explicit reference to

⁴⁴ Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 47; Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 113–14; Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 148–49; Wood, "Doctor's Dilemma," 722, to name a few.

⁴⁵ In Genesis, the terms used for menstruation are נִשְׁמָמָה (Araha נִשְׁמָמָה) (Gen 18:11) and נִשְׁמָמָה (Gen 31:35); these terms are not connected to impurity. In Leviticus, Ezekiel, Zachariah, Lamentations, Ezra, and Chronicles, however, the term used for menstruation is *niddah*, which is associated with impurity. Scholars have explained the origins of the term in various ways. Milgrom argues that the word is derived from the root נִדָּה (Qal – to depart, flee, or wander; *Hiph'il* – to cause to flee, to chase away, expel) or נִדְּה (Pi'el – to chase away, to put aside). He suggests that term originally had the meaning of eliminating menstrual blood, later took on the meaning menstrual impurity as well as impurity in general, and eventually became synonymous with the menstruant; see Milgrom, *Leviticus*

menstruation as well as the text's deep concern for Mary's purity that has convinced Jennifer A. Glancy that Mary's body is so tightly bounded that it is not even affected by the physical mess associated with menses and lochia.⁴⁶ Tracing the events between the time Mary leaves her home in the temple until she receives news of her pregnancy by the angel, Glancy holds that the thrust of the narrative requires Mary to conceive soon after the departure from the temple, that is, while she is still prepubescent: "Mary moves from prepubescent girlhood to pregnancy without bleeding."⁴⁷ The

1–16, 745. Similarly, Levine and Philip derive *niddah* from the root נִדָּה. Levine suggests that the word itself cannot denote "impurity," since impurity is the result of *niddah*; Levine, *Numbers 1–20* (AB 4; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 463–64. Philip links the Hebrew root נִדָּה to the Akkadian *nadû*, the meanings of which are more closely linked to bodily discharges and pregnancies (e.g., to spit out, to excrete or discharge saliva, mucus, tears, blood); Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (StBL 88; New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 32–34. By contrast, Greenberg considers the Targumic Aramaic and Peshitta Syriac renderings of *niddah* and related terms, as well the Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents of Syriac *niddah*. He argues that *niddah* should be derived instead from the Hebrew root נִדָּה, the base meaning of which concerns distancing, both physical and moral. Greenberg also notes that, with Ezekiel, we see a shift in meaning of Hebrew (נִדָּה) *niddah*, from meaning "menstrual impurity" in Biblical Hebrew to meaning "menstruant" in mishnaic Hebrew. See Moshe Greenberg, "The Etymology of Niddah 'Menstrual Impurity,'" in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. Z. Zefit; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 69–77. Philip similarly points to the range of meanings in the semantic field of *niddah* in biblical literature: within early priestly writings (i.e., Leviticus and Ezekiel), there is an emphasis on its impurity, whereas in the later texts (i.e., Zechariah, Lamentations, Ezra, Chronicles) impurity becomes synonymous with *niddah*, which does not occur with other words used for menstruation (cf. mishnaic writings, which also use the term *niddah* to refer to the menstruant herself); *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 32–37. Greenberg, Harrington, and others note that in the non-legal texts of Qumran, the term *niddah* is used to indicate impurity in general, but that in the legal writings, *niddah* is used to refer to the state of menstrual impurity. Harrington writes that menstruants in the Scrolls are often referred to by the term *davah*, meaning "woman with a flow"; see Greenberg, "Etymology of Niddah," 75; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 101; J. Licht, "Qodesh, Qadosh, Qedushah," in *Encyclopedia Mikra'it VII* (ed. E. Sukenik and M.D. Casuto; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1965); 44–62; Yadin, *Temple Scroll I*, 192–93. In the LXX, the Hebrew *niddah* is often rendered by the Greek term χωρισμός (lit. "separation"); see Lev 12:2; 18:19; Zach 13:1; 3 Mac 3:4. The term ἄφεδρος ("menses") is also used; see Lev 12:2, 5, 15:19, 20, 25, 26, 33; Ezek 18:6, 36:17. Neither one of these words is used in the *Protevangelium of James* specifically and directly to indicate menstruation as the source of Mary's potential pollution, but the latter (ἄφεδρος) indeed occurs in the context of Anna's post-partum purification at *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, thus hinting strongly towards the impurities that are associated with the female life-cycle, including menstruation.

⁴⁶ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 108–112.

⁴⁷ Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 108–112 at 111.

suggestion that Mary is physically spared from the pollution of menstruation is intriguing, but it requires an interpretive leap since the text is ambiguous, neither confirming nor denying that she does. What the narrative does make clear, however, is that the priests believe that Mary is potentially polluting and should thus be removed from the sacred space of the temple. What follows is an exploration into the concerns of the priests who fear that Mary is potentially polluting and to identify what specific pollution they may be referring, which I suggest is menstrual impurity.

One hint that the text may be alluding to menstrual impurity is the use of the term *μιαίνω* ("to pollute" or "to defile").⁴⁸ Of the 134 times that this verb occurs in the LXX and OT Apocrypha, it is used 96 times in reference to ritual impurity (i.e., in contexts where the people, land, or sanctuary become polluted because of bodily discharges, etc.) and 38 times in reference to sexual and/or ritual impurity (i.e., in contexts where people are defiled by rape and other acts of sexual deviance). Of the 96 times *μιαίνω* is used in a context of ritual impurity, it is twice used in specific reference to menstruation as ritually polluting to the Temple. In Lev 15:31, for instance, menstruants are instructed, along with those affected by other bodily discharges, to stay away from the Tabernacle, lest they cause it to be defiled.⁴⁹ Similarly, in the *Pss. Sol.* 8:12, menstrual blood is described as defiling the Temple of the Lord and the sacrifices.⁵⁰

In addition, other early Jewish texts attest the prohibition against menstruating women in the Temple and the fear of defilement related to it. As mentioned earlier, some interpretations of the purity laws in the Temple Scroll, for instance, even go so far as to state that women should be isolated during their menstruation and prohibited from living in Jerusalem (11Q19 48.13–17).⁵¹ In A.J. 3.261,⁵² in his retelling of Moses' purity laws, Josephus reports that menstruants were shut out of the Temple and only

⁴⁸ In the LXX, *μιαίνω* is used to render Hebrew *רָאַי* (hi. to reject), *רָאַת* (hi. to be at fault), *רָאַת* (ni. to profane) *רָאַת* (qal. to defile), *רָאַת* (qal. to defile, to pollute, to profane).

⁴⁹ Cf. Lev 15:29, where a *zaba* can enter the court of the sanctuary and have the priest offer atonement in the form of sacrifices on her behalf on the eighth day, once she has been deemed clean from her irregular discharge.

⁵⁰ In the NT, *μιαίνω* is also used four times to denote "defilement." Of the four cases, there are two instances whereby the term is used explicitly for ritual impurity: John 18:28 and Titus 1:15.

⁵¹ E.g., following Yadin, Harrington suggests this possibility based on 11Q19 45.7–10; CD 12.1–2. See also discussion above.

⁵² A.J. 3.261: "He expelled from the city both those whose bodies were attacked by leprosy and those with spermatorrhoea. He segregated until the seventh day women whose secretion occurs for them in accordance with nature, after which he permitted them, as already pure, to associate with the community"; Louis H. Feldman, trans., *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (ed. Steve Mason; Leiden: Brill, 1999, cited from PACE).

allowed to associate with the community after their days of purification; in B.J. 5.226–7,⁵³ he further claims that they were barred from the Temple, even after they were deemed pure. In *m. Nid* 7.4, we also find hints of a concern to seclude women during their time of menstruation, due precisely to the fear of ritual pollution.⁵⁴ Even long after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the idea that menstruants must be kept from polluting the Temple can be seen in texts such as *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Tg^{Ps.-J.} Lev 12.2) and *'Abot de-Rabbi Nathan* (ARN^A 2.3). Although our textual evidence differs with regard to pre-70 Jewish practices concerning how long a menstruant should be barred from sacred spaces and the requirements needed to return to a state of purity, what seems to remain constant is the sharp sense of the polluting power of menstrual blood and the particular fear that menstruants will pollute the sacred spaces of Jerusalem and its Temple.

Read in this context, it does seem plausible that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* meant to evoke the spectre of menstrual impurity, rather than any broader view of women as polluting. Indeed, from the repeated stress on Mary's ritual purity in the first part of the narrative, the possibility that the problem at hand involves her approaching menstruation and not just her gender *per se* seems more likely. In other words, the reader gets no sense, for instance, that the problem might lie instead with the sexual temptation that Mary might pose to the priests. The former interpretation is reinforced further by the reference to Mary's age. Significantly the text informs us twice that Mary has turned twelve, the precise moment when the priests suddenly began to express deep concern that her continued presence might defile the Temple. The first time, her age is noted by the third-person narrator, as marking the turning-point in her life in the Temple. In the speech attributed to the "group of priests," this detail is re-

⁵³ B.J. 5.226–7: "Sufferers from venereal disease or leprosy were debarred from entering the City at all; from the Temple women were excluded during their monthly periods, and even when ceremonially clean they could not go beyond the barrier already described. As for the men, those not thoroughly sanctified were not admitted to the inner court, nor were priests during their time of ceremonial cleansing"; G.A. Williamson, trans., *Josephus: The Jewish War* (ed. E. Mary Smallwood; London: Penguin Books, 1981).

⁵⁴ m. *Nid* 7.4: "All blood-stains wheresoever they are found are deemed clean excepting those found in rooms or round about places of uncleanness" (All translations from the Mishnah are from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974]). The reference to "places of uncleanness," seems to indicate the possibility that women should be isolated during their menstrual impurity. Cf. e.g., *m. Kel* 1.8; *b. Yoma* 16a which attests, according to rabbinic remembrances and/or representations of pre-70 Jewish Temple practice, women were allowed to live in Jerusalem and worship at the Temple, albeit only within the confines of the Court of the Women. On the segregation of menstruants in the Mishnah and other rabbinic literature, see discussion above.

iterated (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3), making clear the importance of Mary's age for her ritual status vis-à-vis the Temple.

Timothy Horner explains the significance of the age of twelve with specific reference to traditions in the Mishnah (esp. *m. Niddah* and *m. Ketubot*) about the process by which girls become women and how they are passed from fathers to husbands.⁵⁵ The laws governing menstrual purity in *m. Niddah*, for instance, are based on a tripartite division of the female life-cycle: [1] from birth to the age of three, [2] from the age of three until twelve (*q'tannah* [קָטָנָה]), and [3] after twelve (*na'arah* [נָעָרָה]) (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.4⁵⁶; 5.7–8⁵⁷). As Horner shows, these divisions correspond to the different stages in Mary's life as described in the *Protevangelium of James*.⁵⁸ Up until the age of three, Mary lives at home with her parents (*Prot. Jas.* 7:2). At the age of three, she is given to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4), and spends the time from the ages of three to twelve living in the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4; 8:3). Finally, at the age of twelve, she must leave the Temple, because of the onset of potential impurity (*Prot. Jas.* 8:4).

That the age of twelve is associated specifically with puberty and thus menstruation in the Mishnah can be shown not only by specific references to *na'arah* (נָעָרָה), defined as a stage when a girl transitions into being a pubescent woman (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.7 writes that this is the age of twelve to twelve and a half), but also by the Tannaitic discourse on determining the signs for when a girl is past her girlhood. The latter involves discussion of the physical differences between a person who has not reached puberty and one who has – the physical differences between a female child and a woman (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.8).⁵⁹ In the Mishnah, then, puberty is defined by the ap-

pearance of two pubic hairs early in her thirteenth year, and for that reason, maturity is regarded as beginning legally at the age of twelve years and one day (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.6–7).⁶⁰

If we read the detail of Mary turning the age of twelve at the point when she is asked to leave the temple in light of the importance of that particular age as marking a transition period between girlhood and womanhood as the discussion of mishnaic sources indicates, the *Protevangelium of James* suggests that the priests are worried about Mary's potential pollution because they expect her to menstruate soon. This reference to her age along with the use of the term *μιαίνω* to describe her pollution, and the attestation of various Jewish sources (e.g., Levitical, Qumranic, Josephus, and rabbinical as discussed above) that prohibit menstrually impure women in the Temple for fear that they may pollute it, support the idea that the cause of potential pollution is indeed the result of Mary's menstruation.

Considering our assumption valid, we might ask why the *Protevangelium of James* includes a passage depicting Mary's removal from the Temple. For instance, if the text intends to imply that menstruation is the cause of pollution and the reason that Mary can no longer live in the Temple, how does this detail contribute to the image of Mary in the text as a whole? Is it meant to attenuate the earlier celebration of Mary's purity and piety? The literary decision to omit an explicit reference to menstruation raises questions as well. Why does the text never state that Mary actually menstruates, but rather leaves open the possibility that she does? Is the reader meant to read this possibility as merely the unfounded worries of the priests? Or as evidence that Mary indeed menstruated? Or even, as Glancy argues, that Mary is actually physically exempt from the stain of menarche?

II. Menstrual Impurity and the Image of Mary

In our attempt to address these questions, we might begin by noting that until this point in the narrative, the *Protevangelium of James* presents Mary as embodying unparalleled purity. As we saw in Chapter Two, the first part of the *Protevangelium of James* depicts her as eminently "pure" in the technical Levitical sense of the term – she is fit to approach the Temple. Furthermore, Mary's exceptional character increases in intensity due to her constant state of ritual purity, whereby she can not only dwell in the Temple, but even play near the altar. That she is protected from being polluted through contact with blood, in particular, is suggested both by the

⁵⁵ Timothy Horner, "Jewish Aspects of the *Protevangelium of James*," *JECS* 12.3 (2004): 313–35.

⁵⁶ According to *m. Nid* 5.4, "a girl three years old and one day may be betrothed by intercourse ... [but] if she is younger than this, it is as one that puts a finger in the eye." According to the Mishnah, indication of one's loss of virginity was based on rupture of the hymen. However, if one's virginity were lost before the age of three years and a day, it is assumed in the Mishnah that the hymen would somehow reconstruct itself. Thus, as Horner has rightly assessed, the loss of one's hymen before the age of three years and a day would be equivalent to putting a finger in one's eye – temporary pain and discomfort, but not permanent physical damage; "Jewish Aspects," 321.

⁵⁷ According to *m. Nid* 5.6 "A girl eleven years old and one day – her vow must be examined; if she is twelve years old and one day her vows are valid, but must be examined throughout the twelfth year..."

⁵⁸ Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 320–25.

⁵⁹ *m. Nid* 5.8: "What are the tokens in her [that she is passed her girlhood?] R. Jose the Galilean says: When the wrinkles appear beneath her breasts. R. Akiba says: When the breasts hang down. Ben Azzai says: When the ring around the nipple turns dark. R. Jose says: [When the breast is so grown] that if the hand is put on the ring around the nipple it sinks and slowly returns."

⁶⁰ Peter van der Horst examines Mary's sexual purity in this context and in these terms; "Sex, Birth, Purity and Asceticism in the *Protevangelium Jacobi*," *Neot* 28.3 (1994): 205–18.

reference to Anna's post-partum purification in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9 and to the stress on the "undefiled" (*ἀμίαντος*) character of her maidservants in *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 and 7:4. Thus when Mary is asked to leave the Temple at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 because of the fear that she may pollute it, readers are forced to reconsider their view of this heretofore purest of the pure character.

How, then, to interpret this new development in the narrative? The first possibility is that the inclusion of an allusion to Mary's menstruation represents an equivocation of her high status, serving to downplay the elevation of this woman. This is the interpretation Mary F. Foskett proposes, suggesting that the narrative's motives to establish Mary as the embodiment of purity serve to signal her role as a holy child and thus her pure lifestyle in the context of holiness.⁶¹ Foskett's interpretation of Mary's purity in terms of holiness, however, does not prevent her from interpreting the reference to Mary's menstruation as signalling a concern for her sexual status and gender, concurrent with her adolescence. She admits that, up to this point, the text "celebrated Mary's female identity and presented gender as a significant and positive Marian character indicator."⁶² In her view, however, the allusion to menstruation in *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 shows that the *Protevangelium of James* ends up following the traditional biblical rhetoric concerning purity and impurity and what she sees as its marginalization of women by "implicitly identifying Mary's approaching menarche as a problem."⁶³ Moreover, she writes that "Mary's identity as a pubescent *parthenos* renders her nonetheless as threatened and threatening as any other female. Thus the very narrative that praises Mary perpetuates an andocentric assessment of its heroine ... even for one who formerly embodied exceptional holiness...."⁶⁴

This answer cannot suffice if we take into serious consideration the broader literary context of *Prot. Jas.* 8:4. Mary's impending menstruation initiates concern among the priests for maintaining the purity and holiness of the Temple; in that sense menstruation, and by extension female gender, are associated with ritual uncleanness in this passage. Yet it does not seem plausible, in my view, that the author wishes to signal a fault in Mary's character – particularly when the rest of text, both before and after this point, so emphatically celebrates her. Hence, we might ask: could Foskett be misguided by the assumption that mention of menstrual impurity always

⁶¹ Foskett's interpretation of Mary's exceptional purity in terms of holiness builds on Saul Olyan's assessment that "the notion of uncleanness has no meaning apart from the notion of holiness; pollution is only a consideration vis-à-vis the holy"; *Virgin Conceived*, 148–49.

⁶² Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148.

⁶³ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 149.

⁶⁴ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 149.

signals a negative view of women? Especially in light of the differences between moral impurity and ritual impurity in biblical and mishnaic law, must impurity always be interpreted negatively?

Another possible explanation for the inclusion of the detail of Mary's menstruation in the *Protevangelium of James* is the attempt to signal her maturation and, therefore, her transition to the status of a potential mother. As we noted in Chapter Two, motherhood is depicted in extremely positive terms throughout by the text beginning at the outset with Anna's lament (*Prot. Jas.* 3:2–8). That passage stresses that childlessness is contrary to nature (esp. *Prot. Jas.* 3:4–8); a childless woman is unblessed, "cursed, reproached, mocked, and thrust out of the Temple of the Lord" (*Prot. Jas.* 3:3). Although this view may contrast with some early Christian celebrations of celibacy and denigrations of sexuality (e.g., 1 Cor 7),⁶⁵ it is consistent with views of fertility and childbirth in the Hebrew Bible, where motherhood is often described as the expression of divine blessings (e.g., Gen 1:28; 20:18; 21:1; 25:21; 1 Sam 1:5, 6).

The reference to Mary's menstruation in *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 may make sense when read against the background of the poignant tension in biblical traditions about childbirth: motherhood is blessed since God is responsible for fertility, pregnancy, and life, but the laws concerning birth as an event associate it with ritual impurities.⁶⁶ According to Milgrom:

Persons and objects are subject to four possible states: holy, common, pure, and impure, two of which can exist simultaneously – either sacred or common and either pure or impure ... one combination is excluded in the priestly system: whereas the common may be either pure or impure the sacred may not be impure.⁶⁷

Milgrom notes that the nature of ritual impurity is associated with those elements of human life that are uniquely creaturely and not shared with God (although they are all God-given) – birth, sex, death. In contrast to the category of moral impurity, the category of ritual impurity speaks less to good and bad elements of human life, but rather to the very differences between human and divine, just as the category of ritual purity describes those specific conditions under which humans can approach God and His sacred spaces.⁶⁸ To be human – male or female – is to be ritually impure at some point or another in one's life; it is unavoidable, according to the biblical purity system, but it is not sinful and represents an impermanent

⁶⁵ On the negative views of sex, marriage, and the body in NT and early Christian literature, see my discussion in Chapter Four.

⁶⁶ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 32–37.

⁶⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 616.

⁶⁸ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 615–16; see also beginning of Chapter Two for a description of the distinction between ritual and moral impurity.

state.⁶⁹ In this context, the act of restraint in not approaching the divine in certain states, and the recognition of the ritual state one must adopt in order to enter certain holy spaces, are understood as pious acts.

Menstruation and childbirth are, of course, closely connected. Childbirth cannot occur until the female body matures, and menstruation is the physiological (as well as cultural and social) sign of such maturation. Not surprisingly then, the menstruant and the parturient are often discussed together. In Leviticus, for instance, the impurity of a parturient is defined in relation to menstruation (Lev 12:1–2); in both cases, the associated blood is polluting.⁷⁰ Being ritually impure, however, does not equate to being sinful, especially given the divine command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). To be a pious woman, by the logic of Levitical law, does not entail refraining from sex and childbirth; rather, it is to observe menstrual separation and to observe the proper days and ritual needed for post-partum purification.

I suggest that this more nuanced understanding of menstrual impurity may help us understand the seemingly anomalous attribution of pollution to the adolescent Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. In my view, given the broader narrative context of *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, it seems unlikely that the reference to Mary’s potential menstrual impurity is meant to reflect any animosity towards women. Within the realm of the Temple, Mary’s menstruation may be polluting, and Mary may be ritually impure, in the sense of no longer being fit to spend all her days within the Temple precincts. Yet the author gives the reader no reason to believe that anyone in the text thinks of Mary’s maturation or ability to menstruate as denigrating to her character. No hint is given that this possibility takes away from Mary’s extraordinary character. In fact, her special status is reconfirmed directly after her departure, in *Prot. Jas.* 8:5, by the description of the way that the priests go about trying to find her an apt husband/protector, discussed in detail below. Mary’s continued worthiness in the eyes of the priests is also emphasized by the account of her selection as a Temple weaver later in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4).

⁶⁹ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 23–24. There are, as Klawans notes, some biblical narratives that view the contraction of ritual defilement (particularly scale disease or leprosy) as a punishment for moral shortcomings. For instance, Moses’ sister Miriam was afflicted with leprosy when she spoke against her brother’s Cushite wife (Num 12), and the Judean King Uzziah also contracted a similar affliction because of his pride and apostasy (2 Chr 26). Klawans stresses, however, that there is nothing within the legal traditions that indicate that the contraction of ritual impurity such as scale disease is the result of transgression; that is, “though the leper is ritually impure, he is not guilty”; *Impurity and Sin*, 25.

⁷⁰ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 32–37.

Most notably, as we shall see, Mary’s departure from the Temple allows her to take on her new role as a potential mother. The implication of her menstruation, in other words, is precisely what serves to open the way for her chosen role as mother of the messiah. Seen from this perspective, the attempt to elevate Mary may even be evident in the avoidance of words for menstruation that might possibly evoke impurity in a negative sense; as in the description of Sarah in Gen 18:11, the reference to Mary’s potential menstruation in *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 is implied and communicated only indirectly.

A related reason for the allusion to Mary’s menstruation is the intention of demonstrating Mary’s adherence to Jewish laws about menstrual separation. Earlier in the narrative, explicit reference is made to Anna’s post-partum purification (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9). Anna immediately and deliberately performs the proper purification rituals and completes the prescribed days, thus firmly establishing her piety and further demonstrating her concern for observance and maintenance of ritual purity. In the Hebrew Bible, menstruants are only condemned when they do not observe the attendant laws for separation (e.g., as outlined in Lev 15).⁷¹ They are not condemned for menstruation per se, because it is a natural process and positively associated with childbirth; it does not fall into the category of a prohibited act of the sort that causes moral impurity (e.g., murder, idolatry, and incest).⁷²

Klawans notes two ways that ritual impurity can lead to moral impurity, according to the biblical purity system. Failure to purify oneself from corpse impurity results in the defilement of the Temple. Corpse impurity is not sinful in the sense that direct contact with a ritually impure person defiles the sanctuary; rather, the conscious decision to refuse purification results in moral impurity and thus defiles the Temple.⁷³ Num 19:13 and 19:20 specify that such refusal is a transgression punishable by *karet* (being cut off from the people). The resolute second way in which ritual impurity can lead to moral impurity applies both to priests and lay Israelites who should neither enter the sancta or come into contact with holy foods when in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:20–21; 15:31; 22:30). The concern again is with the conscious decision to ignore such warnings, which is

⁷¹ Lev 15:31: “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.”

⁷² Though sexual relations may render one ritually impure, they do not necessarily render one impious if the proper purification rituals are observed. According to Lev 18:24–30, however, there are particular sexual relations that do render one both ritually and morally impure and are recognized as sins. These include: incest, sexual relations during the time of a woman’s menstrual uncleanness, homosexuality, and bestiality. See Chapter Four for more on sexual sins.

⁷³ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–25.

sinful and defiles the Temple even apart from any direct contact. For this particular transgression, the punishment is not specified.⁷⁴ As these two examples help to highlight, there is – according to Levitical law – nothing inherently sinful about being ritually impure, as long as one observes the relevant prohibitions. If we read the *Protevangelium of James* from this perspective, Mary's acceptance of the priestly decision that she must leave the Temple takes on another level of meaning: by agreeing to leave the Temple at a time when she could potentially be polluting, she acts as a good Jew, who – like her parents – is attentive to the laws related to ritual purity and the Temple.

This explanation may also help us understand why Mary, after leaving the Temple, continues to stand in such a positive relationship with the priests. With regard to the biblical understanding of ritual impurity, Klawans suggests that:

the primary concern incumbent upon the priests is not to avoid ritual impurity, but to safeguard the separation between ritual impurity and purity (Lev 10:10). Thus the priests are sternly warned against eating sacred food or entering sacred precincts when in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:20–21). Practically speaking, the obligation incumbent upon priests is not avoidance of ritual impurity, but awareness of ritual impurity.⁷⁵

Earlier in the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James*, Reubel is shown misinterpreting Joachim's situation when he decides to turn away Joachim's gifts. But in the case of the priests, they are shown to be correct, according to biblical law, in pursuing their obligation to safeguard the separation between ritual purity and impurity. In Mary's case, they are depicted as accurately identifying her approaching menstruation as a concern. Consistent with the positive view of the priests and the stress on their knowledge of Mary's special status in *Prot. Jas.* 1–7, they are here depicted as exercising the proper actions to prevent the defilement of the Temple by having her leave.

Their subsequent concern for Mary's personal safety and keen awareness of the need to keep this special girl away from any possible defilement supports my argument that her pending menstruation marks a positive point in her journey towards becoming the mother of the messiah. Immediately after Mary is asked to leave the Temple, the narrator describes the priests' panic concerning any potential defilement or lack of protection (*Prot. Jas.* 8:5–8). We will discuss this key passage in more detail below, only noting here that the priests are depicted once again as acting properly with regard to Mary even when they expel her from the Temple. Although the text never tells us whether or not the priests are correct in assuming

⁷⁴ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–25.

⁷⁵ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–25.

that potential pollution they fear Mary will produce is menstrual blood, the author also gives us no reason to doubt the priests' assessment of the situation.

In a sense, the *Protevangelium of James* may depict Mary in a manner akin to the priests who, according to Leviticus, have specific obligations to be aware of their ritual states, lest they accidentally come into contact with the sacred while in a state of impurity (Lev 31).⁷⁶ Just as Anna demonstrated acute awareness of the dangers of impurity during the text's description of Mary's infancy (esp. *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, 6:4–5), so this allusion to Mary's menstruation serves as a means to confirm her recognition of her own ritual state. The priests' decision and Mary's acceptance to depart the Temple thus speak to her piety. Rather than assuming that Mary's menstruation prevents the assertion that she is unequivocally pure, this alternate interpretation offers Mary's menstrual separation as an additional sign of her piety within the narrative world of the *Protevangelium of James*. In other words, the view of ritual impurity in the text seems akin to the biblical laws pertaining to the Temple and sacrifice, whereby ritual impurity is not interpreted negatively. Even pious acts can pollute. As discussed earlier, within the Hebrew Bible, some acts of ritual impurity are celebrated, encouraged, and even demanded by God.⁷⁷ Likewise, in the *Protevangelium of James*, the allusion to menstruation may be tightly tied to Mary's impending transition into motherhood, on the one hand, and to the faithfulness of her Torah-observance, on the other.

Lastly, it should also be stressed that menstruation is treated as a relatively minor impurity in Levitical law. This impurity does not require an elaborate purification ritual to return to a state of cleanliness, particularly compared to other ritual impurities, such as that caused by seminal emissions. Indeed, although Foskett and others assume that the association of impurity with menstruation is a mark of the biblical authors' animosity towards women, we should recall that men too were deemed to be in increased danger of polluting the Temple upon the onset of sexual maturation. The laws surrounding seminal emissions are arguably more severe than those surrounding menstruation. According to Lev 15:19–20, when a woman has a regular discharge from her body (i.e., menstruation), the re-

⁷⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 615.

⁷⁷ Klawans argues that there seems to be no indication that acts that are ritually defiling (such as sex, contact with the mother of a newborn child, or even contact with the dead) are in any way discouraged – such acts, in fact, are not only proper but also obligatory. Biblical law contains no warnings against contracting these kinds of impurities, nor any advice on how to reduce contact with impurities, as might be expected if these types of ritual impurities were indeed discouraged. This absence of regulation seems to indicate that these acts, though they may be the source of pollution, were simply not looked down upon; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–26.

quirement for purification is simply to wait seven days; at nightfall on the last day she is deemed clean, with no requirement for any ritual ablutions.⁷⁸ This automatic cleansing, by simply waiting for the appropriate amount of time to pass, is similarly applicable to the impurity contracted by people whom the menstruant touches; they are only unclean until nightfall.⁷⁹ The ritual impurity conveyed by seminal emissions, by contrast, requires additional efforts in order to return to a state of cleanliness. According to Lev 15:16–18, if a man has a seminal emission, he is required to bathe his whole body in water, then wait for nightfall, in order to be deemed clean again. This extra step of washing is also necessary for any object made of cloth or skin that is touched by semen; all must be washed with water before they can be purified by the passing of time. Ritual impurity, in other words, is hardly limited to women.⁸⁰

If I am correct in suggesting that the *Protevangelium of James* draws its picture of the Temple and first century Jewish life not just from the LXX versions of biblical tales about barren women, but also from biblical laws concerning ritual purity, then we should be wary of assuming, like Foskett, that references to the ritual impurities unique to women must imply their patriarchal oppression. Just as the *Protevangelium of James* strikingly departs from negative views of sex, marriage, and the body found in some

⁷⁸ Cf. interpretation of Leviticus 15 by the 4Q514 5–6 author who suggests that menstruants must both wash with water and launder their clothes in the same manner as all temporarily impure persons. Cohen and Tirzah Meacham have both argued that menstruants were simply sprinkled with water in order to fulfill the requirement of purification. See Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic: Medieval Rabbinic Denunciation of 'Incorrect' Purification Practices," in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall; Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 82–100 and Meacham, "An Abbreviated History of the Development of Jewish Menstrual Laws," in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall; Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 28.

⁷⁹ The same holds for objects touched by a menstruant. It is only when someone touches her bed or something upon which she sat that there is a requirement to wash one's clothes and bath in water; Lev 15:21–23.

⁸⁰ That the concern for maintaining ritual purity in sacred spaces (i.e., the Temple) was not limited to women, but also included men can be seen in comical rabbinic stories about the various way in which the high priest was kept awake during his overnight stay in the Temple before Yom Kippur lest he become ineligible by having a nocturnal emission while sleeping: *m. Yoma* 1.1; "Seven days before the Day of Atonement the High Priest was taken apart from his own house unto the Counsellors' Chamber and another priest was made ready in his stead lest aught should befall him to render him ineligible [by becoming unclean or by suffering certain bodily defects]." Some of these rabbinic "tricks" employed for keeping the high priest awake include limiting his food intake because eating too much may induce sleep (1.4), having young members of the priesthood snap their middle fingers at him, and making him walk on the cold pavement to drive away the temptation to sleep (1.8).

Pauline and early Christian literature, so it seems to resist the interpretation of menstruants and menstrual impurity as significantly more impure (i.e., comparable to a *zabah*) and connected to sin in more ascetic streams of early Judaism. Its view of menstruation may be closer to the Pentateuch, for instance, than to the views expressed by Josephus and the Qumran sectarians.

III. The Literary Function of *Prot. Jas* 8:4

From a literary perspective, one must further ask: How significant is the possible reference to Mary's menstruation in the *Protevangelium of James* as a whole? A close reading of the text's treatment of the events leading up to Mary's departure from the Temple, as well as of the reactions immediately following, will help us "test" the various suggestions outlined above regarding the author's purpose in alluding to Mary's menstruation.

The previous chapter established the text's key thematic interest in the importance of ritual purity connected specifically to the Temple and its sacrificial system. Mary and her family's conformity to the laws and customs of their day emerge as central motifs in the development of crucial aspects of character and plot as the text traces the family members' various interactions and encounters with the Temple, either through its sacrificial system or those that represent it (i.e., the priests).

From the outset, the author establishes the Temple as the center-point with which all characters relate and from which all plot development evolves, thus linking a number of pivotal scenes throughout the text. For example, when Anna receives news of her pregnancy, her first instinct is to offer her child to the Lord as a gift (*Prot. Jas.* 4:2). When Joachim is finally able to participate in the proper rituals upon learning that Anna is pregnant, he offers sacrifices both to the Lord and for the priests, elders, and people (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7, 5:1). When a banquet is held in honour of the infant Mary, the Temple priests confirm the child's special status by means of their blessings (*Prot. Jas.* 6:6). Mary's childhood, moreover, culminates with her arrival at the Temple to live, an event also accompanied by priestly blessings predicting her future role in salvation-history (*Prot. Jas.* 7:7–9).

In fact, we find only one negative comment about the Temple in the first seven chapters of the *Protevangelium of James*, during Anna's lament. Like her husband who is turned away by Reubel, Anna describes herself as being "thrust out of the Temple of the Lord, my God ($\epsilon\zeta\omega\pi\sigma\alpha\tau$ $\mu\epsilon\ \epsilon\kappa\ \nu\alpha\omega\ \kappa\pi\omega\ \tau\omega\ \theta\epsilon\omega\ \mu\omega$; *Prot. Jas.* 3:3)" because of her barrenness (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1). That the text depicts both Joachim and Anna being turned away from the Temple seems, at first sight, to set up and foreshadow the scene at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 when Mary, too, is sent away.

But how does the text actually describe what happens to Mary at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4? Notably, unlike her parents, she is never said to be thrust out of the Temple or rejected by its priests; rather, God decides that it is time for her to leave. Once she has been identified at the age of twelve as potentially polluting, she becomes the center of concern for a group of Temple priests who react immediately by sending the high priest to stand at the altar of the Lord to pray concerning her, and to do whatever the Lord God shall reveal should be done. In other words, the priests recognize that they must leave decisions about this special girl's fate to God. As in the account of Joachim's confirmation of his sinlessness in *Prot. Jas.* 5:1–3 and in the high priestly blessings in *Prot. Jas.* 6:7 and 6:9, the high priest is again associated with special access to divine knowledge. He takes the twelve bells, enters the Holy of Holies, and receives an immediate response by means of a visit from another messenger of the Lord. This time the angelic messenger instructs the high priest – now identified as Zechariah⁸¹ – to assemble the widowers of Israel and to have each of them bring a staff (ῥάβδος); God will send a sign (σημεῖον) indicating which of them he deems fit to take Mary as his wife (καὶ ω̄ ἐὰν ἐπιδείξῃ κύριος ὁ θεὸς σημεῖον, τούτῳ ἔσται γυνή; *Prot. Jas.* 8:8).

An important detail in the description of the messenger's instructions for finding an appropriate husband for Mary is the image of the staff (ῥάβδος). This detail evokes Numbers 17, whereby a staff (ῥάβδος) is also used to determine the priestly line worthy to serve and be responsible for the Temple (Num 17:1–5). In other words, the selection of Mary's husband is described in a manner that recalls the selection of Aaron's line as the caretakers and servants of the Temple: Mary, who was earlier described in terms resonate with a sacrifice, is now increasingly likened to the Temple itself. Mary leaves the Temple but, in one sense, she becomes like the Temple; the text begins now to hint at her emerging status as a pure vessel for God's presence on the earth.

The selection of Mary's husband unfolds in this sequence: heralds are sent forth to all widowers of the people living in the surrounding countryside of Judea; instructions are sent to have all widowers assemble before the high priest; each man is told to bring a staff; after collecting the rods,

⁸¹ Noteworthy is the high priest here who is given the same name as the father of John the Baptist in Luke 1:5–20. Like the Zechariah in the *Protevangelium of James*, Luke's Zechariah is also privy to angelic visits. While serving as a priest for God, he is chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. At this moment an angel of the Lord is sent to Zechariah to inform him of his blessings. It is interesting that in the case of Zechariah and Joseph, the events that unfold before them are dependent upon their selection by lots. This parallel of receiving angelic visits while in the temple is also attested in the *Diatessaron*, whereby Zechariah is also visited by Gabriel who informs him of the upcoming birth of his child.

the high priest enters the temple again and prays; after returning the rods to their proper owners, a dove appears from Joseph's rod and perches upon his head (*Prot. Jas.* 8:9–9:6). What is striking about this description is the high priest's two-fold prayer: once, in order to figure out what to do with Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 8:5); twice, when he takes the rods of all the widowers and prays (*Prot. Jas.* 9:3). The author makes it quite clear that God's will is again expressed by means of the high priest and the Temple is again depicted as the locus of divine presence and prophecy. Not surprisingly, then, just as Aaron's staff buds in Num 17:8, so Joseph's staff too receives a sign – in this case, in the form of a dove (περιστερά).

In Chapter Two, we noted how the symbol of the dove is associated both with sacrifice and with the Holy Spirit. At this point in the narrative, the dove also gains a symbolic connection to Mary herself, by virtue of the description in *Prot. Jas.* 8:2 of Mary being fed like a dove, by the hands of a heavenly messenger. Inasmuch as the dove evokes innocence and purity, the symbol here serves not only to underscore Mary's virginity, but also to allude to the sexual purity of the relationship between her and Joseph,⁸² particularly important for Mary's coming role as the Temple of the messiah.

This theme is further explored by means of the high priests' reaction to the miraculous sign on Joseph's staff: "you have been assigned by lot to receive the virgin of the Lord into your care" (σὺ κεκλήρωσαι τὴν παρθένον κυρίου παραλαβεῖν εἰς τήρησιν σεαυτῷ; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7). This verse represents the first time the narrative refers to Mary as a virgin – and not just any virgin, but "the virgin of the Lord" (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7).⁸³ On one level, we can read this reference in terms of the text's aim of underscoring Mary's continued purity, even after her departure from the Temple. Significant, however, is a shift in the understanding of this purity: the focus is no longer on her ritual purity, as it was in *Prot. Jas.* 1–7, but rather on her sexual purity, as understood in terms of virginity in particular.

Foskett proposes that we read the *Protevangelium of James'* understanding of Mary's virginity as an important point of contact and contrast

⁸² Interestingly, περιστερά also occurs six times in LXX Genesis (LXX Gen 8:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 15:9, where it is used to describe the bird that Noah sends out after the Flood; just as the dove is listed among the clean animals in Lev 11:13–19, so it serves here to confirm that the earth has been purified of the sins that led to the Flood. The term περιστερά also occurs eight times in the Song of Songs (LXX Songs 1:15; 2:10, 13, 14; 4:1; 5:2, 12; 6:8). Here, it is a symbol of love and purity.

⁸³ A description of *parthenos / betulah* as well as a discussion of Mary's role as the "virgin of the Lord" and the theme of sexual purity will be provided in the beginning of Chapter Four.

with Roman traditions about Vestal Virgins.⁸⁴ In her study of the sexual status of Vestal Virgins, Mary Beard discusses how the holiness of these priestesses was directly linked to their virginity and purity.⁸⁵ Like the Vestals, Mary is pure and holy and fulfills the requirement of being of honourable lineage and sound physical condition. In addition, Mary is also like the Vestal virgins in that she belongs to both the deity and to the people.⁸⁶

Despite these similarities, however, Foskett points to important distinctions. Mary neither performs any priestly duties, nor is she ascribed the privileges and obligations of the priesthood.⁸⁷ Moreover, whereas the Vestal Virgins are granted permission to stay at their temples as long as they maintain their virginal state, the situation with Mary is the opposite: it is only after Mary is asked to leave the Temple that the text first emphasizes that she is a virgin.⁸⁸ In this case, as we have seen, the *Protevangelium of James* seems to draw more on biblical and early Jewish understandings of the female life-cycle than on Greco-Roman traditions about virginity. Specifically, Mary's virginity links to her maturation signalled by menstruation.

IV. *Prot. Jas. 8:4 as a Narrative Pivot*

Our literary investigation into the events that lead up to *Prot. Jas. 8:4* highlight the importance of the events that transpire at that point in the text, especially in terms of the development of Mary's character. In other words, Mary is consistently shown to surpass other women of her time in that she is specifically chosen by God based on her unique ritual purity and protected by God as evident by the divinely inspired actions of the priests to find her an apt husband. Equally significant about the events that lead up to *Prot. Jas. 8:4* is the emphasis placed on Mary's sexual purity after this point in the text. Earlier in the narrative Mary's ritual purity dominated the author's concerns, but his focus changes at *Prot. Jas. 8:4* when Mary's potential menstrual impurity produces a scenario in which her sexual purity is questioned. That is, the identification of Mary's potential menstrual impurity at *Prot. Jas. 8:4* serves as a catalyst for why she leaves the Temple and takes up the role of Joseph's "wife" at *Prot. Jas. 9:7*; later, as we shall see, she is questioned by Joseph and the high priests regarding

⁸⁴ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148.

⁸⁵ Mary Beard, "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins," *JRS* 70 (1980): 12–27.

⁸⁶ That Mary does not belong to her parents, for instance, is suggested by the fact that Anna and Joachim disappear from the narrative after Mary is dedicated to the Temple; note also the stress on the people's love for Mary in *Prot. Jas. 7:10*.

⁸⁷ One exception to this example may be her ability to live within the Temple and to come in proximity to the altar; Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148–50.

⁸⁸ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148–50.

her suspected participation in sexual relations at *Prot. Jas. 13:6* and *15:10*, respectively, a questioning only possible given the author's establishment of her development through the female life-cycle. Thus the events of *Prot. Jas. 13:6* and *15:10* hinge on Mary's identification as potentially menstrually impure at *Prot. Jas. 8:4*.

For this reason I would also like to suggest that *Prot. Jas. 8:4* marks a broader shift in the text as a whole. After Mary leaves the Temple, we find less emphasis on ritual purity and more emphasis on sexual purity. Whereas the beginning of the *Protevangelium of James* narratively depicts the Temple as central for purity and piety, the focus increasingly falls, from *Prot. Jas. 8:4* onwards, on Mary's own body as the locus of a piety conceived in terms of sexual purity. When read from this perspective, we see how the reference to Mary's possible pollution of the Temple serves to open the way for her embrace of a new situation and status, namely, as a virgin who can be pure even in common or impure spaces. During her childhood, she was set apart from others by virtue of her physical association with sacred environments (i.e., her bedroom-sanctuary; the Temple). From now on, what defines her and sets her apart from others is her unique status as the "virgin of the Lord."

In what follows, I would thus like to explore further the significance of *Prot. Jas. 8:4* as a narrative pivot within the *Protevangelium of James* by considering how Mary is portrayed in relation to her marriage, on the one hand, and the Temple, on the other. Particular attention will be paid to points of continuity and difference in the depiction of Mary in *Prot. Jas.* chapters 9–10, as compared to her depiction in *Prot. Jas.* chapters 1–7.

The nature of Mary's marriage is made clear in *Prot. Jas. 9:7*. Upon receiving Mary, Joseph is instructed by the high priest to take her in as a guardian under his "care" (*τήρησις*). Although it is mentioned earlier that the purpose is to make Mary the wife (*γυνή*) of the one to whom the Lord God shows a sign (*σημεῖον*); (*Prot. Jas. 8:8*), the text thereafter refrains from depicting Mary as Joseph's wife in the normal sense of the term. Efforts are made to make the marital relationship between the couple ambiguous. The old and sexually unthreatening Joseph is specifically chosen by the Lord to be Mary's "husband," yet he is simultaneously instructed not to act as Mary's husband in the traditional sense of fathering her children, but rather to "take her under your care" (*παραλαβεῖν εἰς τήρησιν σεαυτῷ*; *Prot. Jas. 9:7*).

That our narrative intends readers to interpret the marriage of Mary and Joseph as platonic and similar to the relationship between a father and daughter can be reinforced by comparing their betrothal to what we know of Jewish betrothals and marriage laws. Most helpful are the laws and ideas from proto-rabbinic and rabbinic circles since there is little about Jewish

marriages in post-biblical literature that is distinguishable from other ancient marriage practices. Michael L. Satlow argues that like their Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman counterparts, Jewish women were typically viewed as being under male guardianship (e.g., father or brother) and notes that the rabbis were particularly interested in the moments when a woman was passed from one male to another (e.g., from a father to a husband).⁸⁹

Michael Berger notes in particular that marriage contracts served as a way to ensure the protection (both physical and in terms of material support) of a woman who could be transferred from her father's care.⁹⁰ For a woman who is a minor, her father (if alive)⁹¹ holds full control and is responsible for making marriage contracts for his daughter and for "handing over" responsibility to her husband.⁹² The goals of marriage have much to do with procreation, creating a household, and participating in an activity that is harmonious with God's plan (e.g., Gen 1:28: Be fruitful and multiply).⁹³ Berger notes specifically, that Jewish nuptials were a process that

⁸⁹ Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 78. Note that being betrothed in particular was considered to be a vulnerable position for a woman since she was neither fully under the guardianship of her father nor her husband until the marriage was complete, but rather was stuck in "legal limbo." For Mary, this time of heightened vulnerability occurs the second the priests identify her as turning the age of twelve and decide they can no longer care and protect her until her "marriage" with Joseph is complete.

⁹⁰ Michael S. Berger, "Judaism," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (ed. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 6–7.

⁹¹ Note that there is no indication in the narrative that Mary's father has passed away. In fact, both Joachim and Anna make the decision to transfer their protection over her to the priests, even though she is not of age and they are still capable of caring for her. The oddity of this detail heightens the interpretation that Mary's relationship with Joseph will also be unique.

⁹² Cf. According to *m. Nid* 5.7, a girl who is twelve years and one day old is no longer considered a minor. She has transitioned into the next stage of life, namely, as a pubescent girl (*Na'arath*). The status of a *Na'arath* lasts six months, after which time she enters womanhood (*Bogereth*). When a girl is twelve years, six months, and one day old, she is a full woman who can make her own decisions; she can choose her own husband and may refuse a vow made by her father on her behalf. The concern for finding Mary a suitable husband occurs precisely when she is identified as turning the age of twelve, strengthening the reading of her age in the narrative as reflecting mishnaic concerns. See discussion of Horner's argument above for understanding Mary's specific age references in the narrative in light of mishnaic concerns. See also Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20–39 for a detail discussion of the minor daughter in mishnaic literature, especially as it pertains to defining the various points of the female life-cycle and their status in each stage. Wegner also provides a dialogue for understanding the legal rights and duties of a female person in each stage.

⁹³ Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 26–27.

consisted of several parts and required certain documents; [1] a betrothal; [2] a later wedding ceremony; [3] a dowry and list of obligations; and [4] a wedding feast.⁹⁴ Since only the betrothal is explicitly mentioned in the *Protevangelium of James*, we will focus on this stage of the marriage process. Regarding Jewish marriage proposals, Satlow argues in his discussion of rabbinic marriage laws that there are three ways to establish a marriage betrothal: money, contract, and intercourse.⁹⁵

If we compare these marriage goals and betrothal laws with the arrangement made between Mary and Joseph, the picture that emerges is hardly one of a common marriage arranged for the purpose of procreation. First, Mary's betrothal to Joseph is a decision made not by her father, but by the temple priests and God.⁹⁶ Perhaps the transfer of Mary from her father's home to the temple precinct is meant to set a precedent for her transfer from the guardianship of the priests to Joseph, a circumstance arranged simply for the purpose of protection since Mary is portrayed not only as the daughter of the priests, but even as God's daughter since she dwells in his house. Second, the traditional betrothal laws are not followed: no money or dowry is mentioned, no contract is made, and no sexual intercourse is assumed. In fact, Joseph initially objects to the marriage. He stresses that he already has sons and is too old for Mary: "I have sons and I am elderly, and she is a girl, lest I become a laughing stock to the children of Israel (Υἱοὺς ἔχω καὶ πρεσβύτης εἰμι· αὐτῇ δὲ νεᾶνις μήπως ἔσομαι περιγέλος τοῖς γεννήσασιν Ἰσραὴλ; *Prot. Jas.* 9:8) What is significant about the transfer of Mary from her father's house to the temple priest's house (i.e., temple) and from the temple priest's house to Joseph's house is that Mary is still granted protection and guardianship under these three male figures.⁹⁷ Given that Mary is passed into the care of Joseph in a way that is unfamiliar in regular Jewish marriages, it is clear that the "marriage" between Mary and Joseph is not the traditional sort.

We note additional support for this non-traditional view of their marriage in that despite the divinely-guided nature of the decision, Joseph agrees to the proposal only out of fear. Of particular interest is the basis for the fear that causes Joseph to reconsider his first reaction; namely, the high priest reminds Joseph of Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, the three sons of Levi who offer "strange fire" and are eaten by the earth in punishment in

⁹⁴ Berger, "Judaism," 5.

⁹⁵ Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 79.

⁹⁶ It is God who decides that Mary should be under the care and protection of Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 8:7; 9:7).

⁹⁷ On the notion of marriage as a "transference" and detailed discussion of the necessary steps needed for a Jewish marriage, see David Novak, "Jewish Marriage: Nature, Covenant, and Contract," in *Marriage, Sex, and Family in Judaism* (ed. Michael J. Broyde and Michael Ausubel; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 65–83.

Num 16:1–35. In other words, the text likens the possibility of Joseph's rejection of Mary to the offering of an impure sacrifice. Significantly, in Numbers the actions of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram are what necessitate the limitation of the priestly duties to a single line, which reinforces the parallel between Aaron and Joseph: just as God chooses Aaron and his descendants, by means of a sign on rods, to perform the duties of caretaker over the Temple, Joseph is similarly chosen to care for Mary, who is described in terms similar to both sacrifices and the Temple itself.

Not surprisingly then, not once in the narrative does Joseph himself make reference to Mary as his wife (*γυνή*).⁹⁸ Immediately after agreeing to take her in, Joseph makes his intentions quite clear. He tells her that despite receiving her from the temple of the Lord, he needs to leave her to care for herself in his home, while he is away building houses. Before Joseph leaves, he reassures her that "the Lord will protect you"⁹⁹ (*κύριός σε διαφυλάξει*; *Prot. Jas.* 9:12), the first and only words spoken by Joseph to Mary before he leaves. Consequently, the *Protevangelium of James* makes it abundantly clear that Mary does not belong to Joseph, but rather to God.

In *Prot. Jas.* 9:11–12, Joseph's recognition and acceptance of Mary's role and importance are highlighted by the fact that he follows the instruction of the high priest to care and protect Mary by leaving her under divine protection. Perhaps the reader is meant to imagine that Joseph hopes that the protection granted to Mary, when she lived under the Temple, will be extended to her under his roof. As Mary and her state of purity are now defined in terms of her designation as "virgin of the Lord," the reader might also assume that Mary will be protected by the One to whom she really belongs. Her virginity, moreover, is vouchsafed in narrative terms by the description of Joseph's immediate departure; the *Protevangelium of James* leaves no room for any questions concerning their engagement in any sexual acts.

The next scene, moreover, returns the action of the narrative to the Temple – the place that has served, thus far in the narrative, as the major nexus for the description of Mary and her special status. In *Prot. Jas.* 10:1, we learn of a meeting of the priests, whereupon they decide to make a veil (*καταπέτασμα*) for the Temple of the Lord (*τῷ ναῷ κυρίου*; *Prot. Jas.*

⁹⁸ In fact, on two occasions Joseph struggles with her role in his family. In *Prot. Jas.* 17:2–4, Joseph questions out loud by what title Mary should be given when they are forced to enroll in Emperor Augustus' census and at *Prot. Jas.* 19:5–8, Joseph is questioned directly by the Hebrew midwife regarding Mary's identity.

⁹⁹ Note that the reference to the "Lord will protect you" or "keep a close watch on you," is a common biblical motif. See LXX Gen 28:15, 28:20, LXX Ps 40:3, 41:2, 90:11 and Luke 4:10 are but a few examples where the term *διαφυλάσσω* is used in conjunction with the Lord.

10:1).¹⁰⁰ The narrator does not signal how much time has passed since Mary's departure.¹⁰¹ The plan, however, involves summoning "undefiled virgins from the tribe of David" (*παρθένους τὰς ἀμιάντους ἀπὸ τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ*; *Prot. Jas.* 10:2), which recalls the undefiled maid-servants of Mary during her youth (especially evoked by the word *ἀμιάντος* at *Prot. Jas.* 6:5).

In *Prot. Jas.* 10:3, we are told that seven such virgins are found. Then, however, the high priest also remembers Mary and recalls "that she was of the tribe of David and was undefiled in God [’s sight]"¹⁰² (*ὅτι ἦν τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ καὶ ἀμιάντος τῷ θεῷ*; *Prot. Jas.* 10:4). In effect, the priests who decided that Mary must leave the Temple are precisely the priests who invite her back. In this manner the author makes clear that Mary's purity does not cease when she changes her dwelling place from the Temple to Joseph's home; rather it shifts in focus, concurrent with her own maturation into a woman.

Therefore, Mary's selection for the special task of weaving implies her sexual status as a virgin as well as assumes, moreover, her identification as a descendent of David – an affirmation of the passing reference to her royal lineage earlier in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 10:2).¹⁰³ In depicting Mary as

¹⁰⁰ On the veil that protects the Holy of Holies, see Exod 26:31, 36; 35:25; 36:35; 2 Chr 3:14; this is the connection made by Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51 n.10:1; H.R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 76–77. In the LXX, the Greek term used for this veil is *καταπέτασμα*, the identical word used in the *Protevangelium of James*. In addition, Paul Foster points to biblical references to other veils that protect parts of various sanctuaries in the Israelite/Jewish cult, such as the curtains of blue, purple and scarlet used to make the tabernacle in Exod 26:1 and the curtain that shields the ark in Exod 30:6. Foster sees this detail as creating an intertextual link with the references to the torn Temple veil of the Passion narratives in the NT Gospels (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45); Foster, "The Protevangelium of James," *ExpTim* 118.12 (2007): 577–78; idem, "The Protevangelium of James," in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 116–18.

¹⁰¹ Directly after Joseph's words to Mary – "The Lord will protect you" (9:12) – the next line begins with *Ἐγένετο* and describes the discussion among the priests that will lead to Mary's return. Some translators have rendered this proximity as a description of simultaneous action (e.g., Hock adds "meanwhile"), although the Greek does not signal how much time has passed.

¹⁰² Literally, "undefiled to God." The dative case here is being used as a dative of interest, thus expressing the person interested in or concerned with the statement made.

¹⁰³ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51 n.10:2, reads the reference to the "tribe of David" as problematic, since the Hebrew Bible does not describe a tribe of David among the Israelite tribes. In this instance, however, he may take too literal an approach. The phrase could mean the "tribe of David" in the sense of the Israelite tribe to which David belonged (i.e., Judah) and/or simply stand as shorthand for Davidic lineage. In any case, the point is clearly to stress again Mary's royal lineage, as earlier noted in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2.

Davidic, the *Protevangelium of James* offers quite a different view of Jesus' lineage than those found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke; there, for instance, Mary's genealogy is traced through the line of Aaron (Luke 1:5, 36), and it is her husband Joseph who is from the Davidic line (Matt 1:20; Luke 2:4).¹⁰⁴ Consistent with the diminished role of Joseph in the *Protevangelium of James*, here Mary becomes responsible for transmitting a Davidic – and, hence, messianic – pedigree to Jesus.¹⁰⁵

Despite her marriage to Joseph, however, Mary is referred to as a "child" (παιδίσκη) by the priests in *Prot. Jas.* 10:4. As with the description of the unusual circumstances surrounding her marriage in *Prot. Jas.* 9:11, this detail seems designed to deny her status as Joseph's wife in any traditional sense of the term. The priest also describes Mary as "undefiled in God's sight" (ἀμίαντος τῷ θεῷ; *Prot. Jas.* 10:4). But what precisely is meant by this phrase? What does "undefiled" mean in the context of this narrative, especially in light of the fact that Mary is pure enough to return to the Temple after she is deemed no longer pure enough to live there full time? A number of scholars have translated this phrase to read "pure in the eyes of God,"¹⁰⁶ "pure before God,"¹⁰⁷ "uncontaminated before God,"¹⁰⁸ or

The messianic connotations of Davidic lineage make this connection especially important.

¹⁰⁴ My comparison of the *Protevangelium of James* to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke here does not necessarily assume direct dependence. The Diatessaron, for instance, identifies Mary both through Aaron's line via her relative Elizabeth who is identified as being one of the "daughters of Aaron" (Diat. 1:6, 27), but also through the Davidic line by means of her husband Joseph. On five different occasions, the Diatessaron cites Joseph as belonging to the house of David (Diat. 1:27, 27, 68, 2:3, 9), but re-emphasizes the fact that though engaged to Joseph, and before they came together, Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit (Diat. 2:1).

¹⁰⁵ The *Protevangelium of James* is, of course, not alone in making this claim as other Christ-believers of the second century similarly assert Mary's Davidic ancestry, especially in light of the fact that Joseph does not really pass on his lineage to Jesus except in the indirect sense of an adopted father; see, e.g., Ignatius (*Ign. Eph.* 18.2), Justin (*Dial.* 43, 45, 100, 120). In light of Ignatius' location in Syria (i.e., Antioch) and Justin's association with Palestine (i.e., Samaria), there perhaps may be an echo here of early rabbinic discussions of Jewish ethnicity as passed on through the mother rather than through the father; i.e., according to rabbinic law from the second century CE to the present, the status of the offspring of intermarriage is determined by the mother: a Jewish mother bears a Jewish child, a non-Jewish mother bears a non-Jewish child, regardless of the status of the father in either case. On this, see e.g., Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), esp. chps. 9 (263–308) and 10 (308–40).

¹⁰⁶ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 114; Oscar Cullmann, "The *Protevangelium of James*," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schnee-

even "sans tache devant Dieu."¹⁰⁹ In each translation, the range of meaning for the word ἀμίαντος and the use of the dative to render the meaning "before" are limited to Mary's sexual purity, i.e., her virginity. In my translation of "undefiled in God's sight" I suggest that the reference to "undefiled" cannot simply be limited to her virginity if we take into consideration the range of meaning ἀμίαντος is given elsewhere in the narrative.

The author employs this term in reference to a variety of situations in the *Protevangelium of James*. Above, we noted the use of the term ἀμίαντος to describe Mary's companions in *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 and 7:4 and the use of the phrase παρθένους τὰς ἀμίαντους to describe the weavers in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2. In Chapter Two, we discussed the fact that the term ἀμίαντος appears in the OT apocrypha and NT literature, used there to refer to virginity,¹¹⁰ but also in the context of ritual purity,¹¹¹ and suggested that the three scenarios listed above (*Prot. Jas.* 6:5, 7:4, and 10:2) draw on both meanings.

Likewise, most translators have read the phrase παρθένους τὰς ἀμίαντους in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2 as a hendiadys, so that the two words used mean the same thing, but whereby the repetition serves to intensify the meaning. Ronald F. Hock, for instance, translates the phrase as "true virgins," thus rendering a meaning that speaks only to their sexual purity as virgins.¹¹² While a sexual connotation undoubtedly can be attributed to the word "virgin" (παρθένος), in my view, the adjective ἀμίαντος may actually have a different function beyond simply intensifying the status of these girls as virgins, which is why I have suggested that the phrase παρθένους τὰς ἀμίαντους at *Prot. Jas.* 10:2 be translated as "undefiled virgins."

Given the text's emphasis on pollution and the female life-cycle two chapters earlier (i.e., *Prot. Jas.* 8:4) and its sensitivity towards the purification of female-specific impurities already signalled by the account of An-

melcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 430; David R Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, "The Gospel of James," in *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 111; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 61.

¹⁰⁸ Robert J. Miller, ed., "The *Protevangelium of James*," in *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1992), 381.

¹⁰⁹ Albert Frey, "Protévangile de Jacques," in *Écrits Apocryphes Chrétiens I.* (ed. F. Bovon et P. Geoltrain; Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 91.

¹¹⁰ E.g., *Wis* 3:13; 8:20.

¹¹¹ E.g., in the context of abstaining from the impure; *Wis* 4:2; 2 *Macc* 14:36; 15:34; *Heb* 7:26; 1 *Pet* 1:4.

¹¹² Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51.

na's post-partum purification (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9), a better reading might be that the adjective ἀμίαντος is actually used by the author to evoke a sense of menstrual purity. In other words, these girls are not only sexually pure but also menstrually pure. This interpretation would also explain, for instance, why the high priest is described as having such a difficult time finding girls who meet all the requirements to weave the Temple veil in *Prot. Jas.* 10:3, as it would be necessary that those chosen were not only virgins and Davidic in lineage, but also not menstruating at the time that they serve as weavers. If ἀμίαντος evokes for Mary's companions both a concern for their sexual and ritual/menstrual purity, how much more would the term ἀμίαντος in its various connotations be appropriate to describe Mary's purity before God?

The text makes very clear that Mary's ritual and menstrual purity surpasses all others and makes her an attractive and uniquely qualified candidate to be chosen by God as his virgin.¹¹³ This fact is expressed even in the way Mary and seven other virgins are chosen for the important task of weaving the Temple veil;¹¹⁴ they are taken into the Temple of the Lord and lots are cast for the various colours. The description of the casting of lots recalls the parallel manner in which staffs were used earlier to determine Mary's husband. In each case, the message rings clearly that God ultimately decides the outcome (and not simply random selection), resulting in a choice that is, from a narrative as well as theological perspective, much more significant. This device of casting lots is also employed in the selection of the high priesthood at the very end of the narrative when Simeon is chosen by lot to succeed after news spreads of Zachariah's murder (*Prot. Jas.* 24:12).¹¹⁵ In this way, Mary's appointment by the casting of lots to

¹¹³ As discussed above, the term ἀμίαντος used to describe Mary's companions/virgins at *Prot. Jas.* 6:5, 7:4, and 10:2 may be interpreted as reflecting their status both as virgins and as ritually pure. That is, Mary only had contact with virgins who were also ritually pure (not menstruating). Although we are told that seven virgins are worthy enough to be chosen to weave the temple veil, it is unlikely that they too underwent the same conditions as Mary to maintain their purity. Mary may have only been exposed to ritually pure virgins, but this fact does not mean that these companions in turn only associated and made contact with ritually pure virgins themselves. Mary's purity is clearly presented in the narrative as being superior to all others which is why she, and not any other virgin, is selected as the Lord's virgin.

¹¹⁴ Noteworthy also is the significance of Mary as the eighth weaver and the one added to what appears, at first sight, to be an already whole contingent of seven.

¹¹⁵ The practice of casting lots is mentioned seventy times in the Hebrew Bible, most often in connection with the division of land under Joshua (Josh 14–21). To be sure, various offices and functions in the Temple, especially in relation to the duties of the priests, are also determined by lot; i.e., 1 Chr 24:5, 31; 25:8–9; 26:13–14. The use of lots is also attested in the NT seven times: lots are cast to determine who will replace Judas (Acts 1:26) and who will take possession of Jesus' garments (Matt 27:35). See further, William

"the scarlet and true purple threads" (Καὶ ἔλαχε τὴν Μαριὰν ἥ ἀληθινὴ πορφύρα καὶ τὸ κόκκινον; *Prot. Jas.* 10:8) is significant. Scarlet (κόκκινον) is often used in the Hebrew Bible and NT writings to refer to blood atonement and sacrifice and is regularly cited in association with cleansing and purification (e.g., Lev 14:4, 52; Num 19:6; Heb 9:19). In Prov 31:21, scarlet is symbolically associated with a virtuous woman.¹¹⁶ Thus Mary's connection with the colour scarlet appears particularly fitting given the narrative's efforts to present her as "pure and pious," and, as demonstrated in the last chapter, very much likened to a sacrifice. In addition, the colour purple (πορφύρα) and its association with royalty and riches is equally appropriate given Mary's identification as descended from both a wealthy family as well as the royal line of David (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1; 10:4).¹¹⁷ In other words, Mary's allotment of the scarlet and purple threads signifies that she alone is chosen to be responsible for the royal segments of the veil; even among a group of other Davidic virgins, she emerges as the most royal.¹¹⁸

Having entered the Temple to receive her threads, Mary returns home to weave them (*Prot. Jas.* 10:8). Again, we see Mary's purity described by means of her movement between different literary spaces. The common space of her new home contrasts with the status of her childhood home as akin to a sanctuary as well as with the Temple in which she once dwelt. In her new home, Mary is no longer fed by the hand of heavenly angels, but rather must go out in the open to retrieve her own water (Καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν κάλπιν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν γεμίσαι ὕδωρ; *Prot. Jas.* 11:1). Mary's purity shifts its dependence from being defined by sacred places, and by the asso-

A. Beardslee, "The Castings of Lots at Qumran and in the Book of Acts," *NovT* 4.4 (1960): 245–52.

¹¹⁶ Other references to the use of scarlet include: a scarlet cord around Zerah (Gen 38:28–30); scarlet used in the tabernacle (Exod 25:4); a scarlet cord hung from Rahab's window (Josh 2:18); indication of prosperity (2 Sam 1:24; Prov 31:21); Jesus' robe is scarlet (Matt 27:28); scarlet is the colour of the beast ridden by the harlot by Babylon (Rev 17:3).

¹¹⁷ Other references to the colour purple include: used in the tabernacle (Exod 26:1; 27:16); and the temple (2 Chr 2:14); used in royal robes (Judg 8:26); used in garments of the wealthy (Prov 31:22; Luke 16:19); clothes worn by a harlot (Rev 17:4); the robe placed on Jesus (Mark 15:17, 20).

¹¹⁸ Smid argues that Mary's superiority over the other seven virgins is further exemplified by the fact that when a temple veil is ordered by the priests, seven virgins are selected to weave seven different colour threads: a complete group is made. However, when Mary is remembered as the most important of these virgins, she cannot be left out and in fact is allotted by God's decree not one, but two of the most important colours. Although the narrator does not provide details on how the other seven virgins are to divide the five additional coloured threads, evident in this scene is Mary's special role as God's chosen; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 78–79.

ciation with only pure food, ground, and people, to a purity that can be centered outside the Temple, in her own body.

Although Mary's purity becomes increasingly defined outside the Temple after *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, her intimate connection with the Temple remains intact when the description of Zechariah becoming mute and being temporarily replaced by Samuel as high priest (*Prot. Jas.* 10:9) is awkwardly inserted between the description of Mary receiving the purple and scarlet threads and her actually taking up the threads to spin them. Hock suggests that the awkwardness of this detail at *Prot. Jas.* 10:9 should be attributed to the author's attempt to place his narrative within the framework of Luke's canonical account,¹¹⁹ but I would argue that the place of this peculiar yet evocative reference to Zechariah and Samuel may serve another purpose. This notice, indeed, interrupts the description of Mary's weaving, thus implying some connection. First, this correlation recalls the circumstances surrounding and leading up to Zechariah's muteness; namely, as part of the priestly line, Zechariah is not elected, but chosen by lot in God's providence akin to the manner that Mary is chosen by lot and God's will to perform the sacred task of weaving the temple veil. And second, this scene may serve to imply in yet another way that the link between Mary and the Temple remains mysteriously close, in a manner that will not become fully evident until after her motherhood of the messiah.

Mary's impending menstruation as the likely cause for defilement at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 in turn functions as a turning point for an interest in a new kind of purity in the narrative: sexual purity. Significantly, only when Mary leaves the walls of the Temple is she first identified as a virgin and designated the title "virgin of the Lord." Mary's new role and the narrative's shift in concern from ritual purity and menstrual purity to sexual purity raises questions concerning relevant terms such as *parthenos/betulah*, our next topic for discussion.

D. Conclusion

The *Protevangelium of James'* description of the events surrounding Mary's withdrawal from the Temple along with a literary analysis of the key verse at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 suggest that the text alludes to Mary's potential menstruation as the reason she must leave the temple precinct. The text's continual stress on ritual purity early in the narrative coupled with the use of the term *μίανω* make clear that the concern here is with ritual purity and not, for instance, Mary's gender *per se* or any broader view of women as polluting. The priests in the narrative, for instance, continue to treat her as a special and pure girl, as clear from the events surrounding the choice of her husband in *Prot. Jas.* 9:6–7. Moreover, her re-entrance into the Temple in *Prot. Jas.* 9:2–8 is by priestly invitation.

From a narrative standpoint, *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 may be viewed as a narrative pivot in the text. In other words, whereby ritual purity in terms of the Temple and sacrifices (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1–8:3) helped anticipate and foreshadow the concern for menstrual impurity in the text, the identification of

¹¹⁹ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51 n. 10:9.

Chapter Four

Mary and Sexual Impurity

A. Introduction

The present chapter reassesses the influential and much-discussed references in the *Protevangelium of James* to Mary as the “Virgin of the Lord” (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7). I propose that the characterization of Mary’s purity takes a new turn after *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, shifting away from a general concern for ritual purity towards a more focused interest in sexual purity, i.e., Mary’s sexual status as a virgin or *parthenos*. Additionally, I also explore allusions to Mary’s moral purity introduced during the questioning of her sexual status, as well as consider the references to Mary’s Davidic lineages as commentaries on her genealogical purity, with the goal of examining what contributions, if any, are made to her characterization as a result of these references. Moreover, this final purity chapter also considers how the theme of sexual purity contributes to the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* as a whole, especially in light of my previous findings concerning the place of ritual and menstrual purity in the first half of the text.

B. What is Sexual Purity/Impurity?

In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary holds the unique status as both Mother and Perpetual Virgin. What is more, Mary’s maintains her position as Virgin Mother despite her marriage to Joseph. Given that Mary’s sexual purity is understood especially in terms of her virginity and continual practice of celibacy and continence, I propose to survey a variety of sources and their ideas on these related topics in contrast and relation to marriage. Additionally, since Mary simultaneously takes on the role of mother, I also examine ideas surrounding the impurity that is produced by parturients, especially in my discussion of chapters 19 and following where the details surrounding the birth of Jesus at *Prot. Jas.* 19:16 will be compared to Mary’s own birth at *Prot. Jas.* 5:9.

C. Virginity and Celibacy in Early Jewish Sources

I. *Betulah* and *Parthenos*

The Hebrew term *betulah* בָּתָלָה is often translated as “virgin,” but is also commonly used to mean simply “young woman,” which places emphasis only on age and not physical characteristics (e.g., Deut 32:25; Isa 23:4, 42:5; Jer 51:22; Ezek 9:6, etc.). The phrase “who has not known a man” is often added to the word in order to emphasize her virginity (e.g., Judg 19:39, 21:12; Gen 24:16: “a man has not known her”).¹ The plural term *betulim*, however, is almost always used to refer to virginity.²

In the *Protevangelium of James*, the Greek word *parthenos* is used to describe Mary’s sexual status as a virgin. As Mary F. Foskett rightly notes, the term *parthenos* has been problematic for Christian interpreters since it corresponds roughly to the Hebrew term *betulah* and can render multiple connotations³ including one’s sexual status, age, or both; i.e., both may be translated to mean “virgin” or “young woman.”⁴ While both definitions are relevant to this discussion, this chapter draws primarily on Mary’s virginity.

II. Virginity, Celibacy, and Marriage in the Hebrew Bible

In the Bible, the laws concerning the accused bride (Deut. 22:13–21) and the unmarried virgin who is forced into intercourse (Deut. 22:28–29) establish clear views on chastity and virginity: unmarried girls are to remain virgins until they are married to a man chosen for them by their father. Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that the expectation that young girls should remain virgins is embedded in the Hebrew language since the term *betulah* allows for various connotations: virgin, young girl, young girl of marriageable age.⁵ In other words, virginity and chastity in the Hebrew Bible are often understood in the context of marriage in that virginity is interpreted as a prized and expected possession for young unmarried girls as illustrated in the story of Lot and his daughters (Gen 19), but if lost before marriage, considered a sign of dishonour and disgrace as presented in the story of Dinah (Gen 34). As expected, these ideas about virginity and celibacy

¹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. V. Matthews, B. Levinson, and T. Frymer-Kensky; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 79.

² Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” 80.

³ Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 16.

⁴ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 16.

⁵ Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” 79.

are directly linked to the divine command to be “fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28), such that virginity and the practice of celibacy are promoted only as a way of life up until the opportunity of marriage arises.

In terms of biblical ideas on marriage, Michael S. Berger argues that large agrarian patriarchal families were encouraged by the goal of achieving legitimate heirs; thus, strict rules of endogamy and exogamy, especially concerning incest, were enforced. The process of marriage perhaps undergoes greater formalization as evident by the fragmentary papyri from Elephantine,⁶ which includes one of the earliest known written contracts and set dowries.⁷ These ideas concerning virginity in the context of marriage and the formalization of the marriage procedure are especially interesting in light of Mary’s arranged “marriage” to Joseph (since her virginity is questioned not before, but after she is already living in his home and is technically Joseph’s wife) and to the process by which they are “married.”

III. Virginity, Celibacy, and Marriage in the Scrolls

Although the Scrolls do not discuss virginity explicitly on its own terms, the practice and view of celibacy for the Qumran community have been long questioned and debated by scholars. The practice of celibacy for the whole community was assumed based on the belief that the Qumran community were in fact the Essenes, a male-only celibate community.⁸ However, no explicit statement appears anywhere that indicates that celibacy was the practiced norm or that the community was comprised only of male members. Eileen Schuller and Cecilia Wassen both note that the burial sites excavated surrounding the settlement preserved the bones of relatively few women and children compared to the male remains, but both maintain no definitive conclusions can be made.⁹ One passage in the Damascus Document, however, hints towards the community’s beliefs and practices on celibacy. CD 6.11–7.9 describes two groups: the first group “will walk according to these precepts in perfect holiness, according to all the teaching of God,” while the second group will “live in the camps according to

⁶ See B. Porter and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt: Contracts*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989), doc. B2.6.

⁷ Michael S. Berger, “Judaism,” in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (ed. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2–4.

⁸ Eileen Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned?* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 81; Geza Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 2–3, 12.

⁹ Schuller, *What Have We Learned?*, 98; Cecilia Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document* (SBLABib 21; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 6.

the rule of the land, marrying and begetting children.”¹⁰ The first group thus seems to reflect those who practiced celibacy and other forms of asceticism, while the second group participated in marriage for procreative reasons.

Persuaded by the idea of a community of male celibates, Louis Ginzberg, among others, suggests that the reason for such practices can be attributed to purity regulations and the attempt to achieve a level of purity comparable to Temple priests.¹¹ Namely, since the group occupies “a sanctuary built by the sect in the land of Damascus,” purity rules, including forbidding sexual intercourse in the city of the temple and other sexual prohibitions, were required to prevent its defilement; thus celibacy was thought to be a good defence.¹² Scholars like Lawrence Schiffman and Joseph M. Baumgarten, who oppose the Essene identity of the community, often reject the idea that celibacy was practiced exclusively. Schiffman argues instead, for instance, that the Qumran complex served as a male-only study center for men for whom studies were required for membership, but who were nonetheless husbands and fathers.¹³ Baumgarten argues that celibacy in the community existed only as a practice after gaining membership; that is, after already having been married and fathered children.¹⁴ Interestingly, Baumgarten and Wassen also consider the possibility of celibacy

¹⁰ Schuller, *What Have We Learned?*, 98; Translations are from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds. and trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Also cf. Matt 19:17, 21.

¹¹ Louis Ginzberg, *An Unknown Jewish Sect* (ed. and trans., Ralph Marcus et al.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1976), 32–33; Elisha Qimron, “Celibacy in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Two Kinds of Sectarians,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, 1:290–94; Matthew Black, “The Tradition of Hasidean-Essene Asceticism: Its Origins and Influence,” in *Aspects du Judéo-Christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23–25 Avril 1964* (ed. Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg. Centre de Recherches d’histoire des Religions; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 19–33; A. Marx, “Les Racines de Célibate Essénien,” *RevQ* 7 (1970): 323–42, etc.

¹² Ginzberg, *Unknown Jewish Sect*, xiii. The precise meaning of “Damascus” has been hotly debated and although Ginzberg’s assumption that the sect’s final place of settlement was Damascus has been rejected by scholars, his evidence for the practice of celibacy at Qumran is widely accepted. See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Damascus,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L. Schiffman and J. VanderKam; 2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:165–66.

¹³ Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 53, 135; cf. idem, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983), 214–15.

¹⁴ Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage,” in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin* (ed. Lawrence Schiffman; JSPSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 13–24.

bate women as members of the community.¹⁵ For the purpose of our study we will consider the Damascus Document's concept of celibacy as "perfect holiness," understood as a higher road for living one's life according to God's will in light of Mary's dualistic role as Virgin Mother.

IV. Virginity, Celibacy, and Marriage in Rabbinic Sources

Much like biblical law, rabbinic ideas concerning virginity and celibacy are very much understood in the context of marriage; that is, virginity is prized before marriage and celibacy in marriage occurs at specific times and for specific purposes. In rabbinic literature, however, the idea that marriage entails a legal contract between two individuals takes on new meaning as evidenced by the sheer volume of literature devoted to specific obligations and responsibilities for those who engage in such contracts.¹⁶ For men, these obligations included providing protection and material support; for women, their responsibilities were linked to providing assistance in the household and in procreation.¹⁷ In addition to interpreting Genesis 1:28 as a divine commandment,¹⁸ the rabbis also interpreted Exodus 21:10 as establishing conjugal relations between a husband and wife as obligatory and greatly encouraging sexual relations for the purpose of procreation (*b. Yoma* 72b; *b. Pes* 112b, *b. Men* 110b, *b. Ta'an* 16a; *b. Qid* 29b).¹⁹ Sex is even presented in rabbinic literature as the husband's conjugal duty to his wife.²⁰ For our purposes, obligatory sexual relations within marriage is an idea we will look at in more detail especially with regard to the description of Mary's and Joseph's marriage as it may speak to the reality of their relationship since such an obligation is not demanded of the couple and, in fact, is the reason they are accused and must stand trial before the high priest.

¹⁵ Baumgarten, "Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage," 13–24 and Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 8. Cf. Ross Kramer who has argued for the unlikelihood of women at Qumran; "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutides," *Signs* 14 (1989), 365.

¹⁶ E.g., in the Mishnah, four of the seven tractates within the Order of the Women are devoted to marriage and divorce. On this, see Berger, "Judaism," 6–8.

¹⁷ Berger, "Judaism," 6–8.

¹⁸ Jeremy Cohen argues in his exhaustive discussion of this verse that the rabbis might be motivated to interpret Gen 1:28 as having legal force. See his "Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": the Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), esp. 158–65.

¹⁹ Eliezer Diamond, "And Jacob Remained Alone": The Jewish Struggle with Celibacy," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* (ed. Carl Olson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

²⁰ Berger, "Judaism," 6–8.

While rabbis clearly promoted marriage and sexual relations for the purpose of procreation, they did not do so without regulations. In accordance with biblical law and as discussed in Chapter Two, for instance, sexual intercourse with a menstruant, regardless of whether done within the boundaries of marriage, was strictly forbidden (Lev 18:19 and 20:18). Additionally, though celibacy was not common in rabbinic thought, we do possess documentation that some individuals practiced celibacy. Eliezer Diamond suggests that such cases occurred most often among the religious elite.²¹ In *t. Yeb* 8.7, rabbi b. Azzai is the only sage explicitly presented as a celibate.²² Although rabbi b. Azzai, in a conversation with his colleague, does not deny that being celibate is sinful and likened to murder, he also admits that his soul lusts for Torah so much that there is little emotion left for a relationship with a woman.²³ While rabbi b. Azzai may be the exception to the rule, Daniel Boyarin argues that this impulse for study and devotion to the Torah was also present in many of the rabbi's peers so much so that the story of rabbi b. Azzai can be used as an "index of how much energy was required to combat the attractiveness of celibate life"²⁴ since at one point or another, most discipleships required the practice of celibacy for a significant period of time to study Torah.²⁵

D. Virginity, Celibacy, Asceticism, and Marriage

I. Jesus

Although celibacy in the NT shows significant points of contact with practices of sexual renunciation found in the sources discussed thus far, sexual restraint took on a different form unique from its predecessors and contemporaries. This new form is shaped by the idea that virginity, celibacy, and ascetic practices explicitly offered a higher road to salvation than married life.²⁶ This attitude is especially apparent in Jesus' more radical exhortations.

²¹ Diamond, "And Jacob Remained Alone," 41–42.

²² Diamond, "And Jacob Remained Alone," 52–53.

²³ For this reason Daniel Boyarin describes the Torah as "the other woman"; *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 134.

²⁴ Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 136.

²⁵ This being said, it is important to remember that the kind of celibacy practiced by rabbi b. Azzai and possibly his colleagues was not endorsed as a form of spiritual discipline as it was for some Christian ascetics who practiced celibacy and even virginity as a way to withdraw from the world as we will see below.

²⁶ Glenn Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* (ed. Carl Olson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65–66.

tations on the requirement of discipleship and in Paul's views on sexual purity that can be illuminated by understanding his concept of the body and his ideas on the superiority of the path of virginity and celibacy over marriage (even legitimate marriages).²⁷

According to Mark, in his proclamation on the imminent arrival of the Kingdom, Jesus demanded a response from those who followed him. Since the evidence seems to indicate that Jesus himself was unmarried and celibate, the response to his message often involved precluding marriage and other everyday responsibilities.²⁸ Jesus also taught on issues of sexual morality and restraint as demonstrated in his prohibition of divorce (Mark 10:1–9), and his call for those to forsake voluntarily what is natural in regards to sexuality (e.g., marriage and sexual intercourse for procreation) in order to follow him (cf. Mark 6:4–6, Matt 10:37–39, Luke 9:59–62), providing evidence of his priority for his followers over his own family (cf. Mark 3:20–21, 31–35).²⁹ Additionally, since Jesus' resurrection was not for the purpose of continuing his mortal life, but rather his eternal spiritual life as God's son and because Jesus offered the opportunity to participate in his eternal spiritual life via the Holy Spirit, for Jesus' earliest followers participation in earthly activities that reflected the body such as marriage and procreation was held in much less esteem than the spiritual path that offered eternal heavenly rewards.

II. Paul

For Paul, since the body served as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19) and functioned as members of Christ and belonged to the Lord (1 Cor 6:15), having sex especially outside of marriage and with prostitutes and unbelievers was sacrilegious and resulted in *porneia*, sexual immorality.

²⁷ See e.g., Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 44–57; Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 68–70. See also Elizabeth Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub; New York: Routledge, 1991), 29–50; *ibidem*, "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *JFSR* 2 (1986): 61–88.

²⁸ Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 67–68 and Luke Timothy Johnson and Mark D. Jordan, "Christianity," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (ed. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 79.

²⁹ Note that some apostolic missionaries, who spread the gospel after Jesus' death, seem to have continued to live closely according to Jesus' teachings on marriage, but that other missionary apostles including Peter are said to have been married and to have traveled with their wives (1 Cor 9:4–7). See Johnson and Jordan, "Christianity," 80–81.

ty (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *zenut*).³⁰ Drawing on the belief that a husband and wife become one flesh (Mark 10:8) in sexual intercourse and that the holy body of a believer is joined to the holy body of Christ, Paul believed that the impurity contracted from such a union resulted in the defilement of not only the believer, but also of Christ himself.

According to the Corinthians, Paul preached that "it is good not to touch a woman" (1 Cor 7:1), that continence and sexual renunciation stood as the true calling from God, and that he "wished all men were as I myself am," but qualifies this statement immediately by also acknowledging that not everyone would receive the specific gift of continence, as he had from God (1 Cor 7:7).³¹ Paul is clear that sexual purity in terms of virginity and the practice of celibacy constituted a higher path than marriage, but that only a select few are given the gift to follow through with such a calling. Although Paul did not believe that the whole of society should adopt his practice of celibacy, he also had no intention of praising marriage either.³² Marriage for Paul was directly linked to the dangers of *porneia* and the potential sexual immorality caused by sexual frustration. Marriage was no more than a way to control desire and a safer option than unconsidered celibacy against sexual immorality.³³ In sum Paul instructed the following: [1] sex outside of marriage is a serious problem (1 Cor 6:12–21); [2] if one cannot practice self-control, it is better to marry than to be distracted by passion (1 Cor 7:1–7); [3] a celibate life is better and simpler than a married life because marriage is a distraction from higher pursuits (1 Cor 7:8–9); [4] those who are married should remain married, but if they do divorce not of their own accord, they should remain unmarried (1 Cor 7:10–16); [5] virgins should remain virgins since there are advantages (e.g., no distractions from marriage) for those who are able to follow it, but do not sin if they are married (1 Cor 7:25–35); [6] betrothed virgins and widows should marry if they have no self-control, but if they can control themselves, then it is better not to get married (1 Cor 7:36–40).³⁴

³⁰ Brown, *Body and Society*, 54–57. See also Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92–93.

³¹ Brown, *Body and Society*, 54.

³² Brown, *Body and Society*, 54–55; Johnson and Jordan, "Christianity," 82–83.

³³ Brown, *Body and Society*, 54–55; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 93–94.

³⁴ On the vast literature on 1 Corinthians 7, see e.g., Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61–72; Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows, and Wives: The Women of 1 Corinthians 7," in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 148–68; Gillian Beattie, *Women and Marriage in Paul and His Early Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2005), 15–36; Annemarie S. Kidder, *Women, Celibacy*,

For the purposes of our study, Paul's thoughts on the relationship between sexual immorality and moral impurity and how the latter is decisively different than the impurities we have discussed thus far remain relevant, in addition to his views on the superiority of celibacy over marriage. Moral impurity for Paul is directly connected to sexual sins and the misuse of the body. That Paul intended this connection is evident in the juxtaposition of "impurity" with *porneia* in Gal 5:9.³⁵ Christine E. Hayes designates this kind of impurity as "carnal impurity" because it involves a defilement of the flesh that is transferrable to another flesh by means of sexual activity. In this way, carnal impurity can be interpreted as a conflation between the features of moral and ritual impurity as discussed in Chapter Two since it is a moral impurity, but has the ability to remain on the flesh and may be contracted to others physically.³⁶

Most interesting is Hayes' suggestion that a shift is apparent in the focus from genealogical³⁷ to carnal impurity in early Christian understandings of impurity, beginning with Paul's writings. In the context of understanding early Jewish self-definition and the perceived boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, Hayes refines the two-fold understanding of impurity (ritual and moral) to include a third category, namely genealogical impurity that she defines as a concern for the purity of blood and an intrinsic impurity that cannot be removed.³⁸ Although Hayes' argument is suggested in relation to understanding intermarriage and conversion, I would like to test Hayes' notions regarding this shift from genealogical to carnal impurity in the context of our discussion of Mary's sexual purity and in light of our narrative's concern for Mary's Davidic lineage.

III. Second and Third Centuries Views

Before proceeding further, however, we must consider some general views held on virginity, celibacy, asceticism, and marriage in the second and third centuries, the approximate date of the *Protevangelium of James*' composition. Not only will such a discussion help situate our narrative's ideas on sexual purity against the views held in the sources discussed thus

bacy and the Church: Toward a Theology of the Single Life (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 40–51. On understanding the motivation behind Paul's views on celibacy, see Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (SNTSMS 83; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁵ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 93.

³⁶ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 96.

³⁷ For Hayes' definition of genealogical purity, see *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 27.

³⁸ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 27 ff.

far, but may also provide insight into the kinds of beliefs about sexual purity that potentially influenced our narrative.

What scholars have learned about virginity, celibacy, and asceticism is that by the end of the first century small groups of men and women among the Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean and in the Near East participated in ascetic practices among which celibacy was the most common discipline. Glenn Holland suggests three reasons for such practices: [1] in expectation of the end of days; [2] in preparation for the Kingdom and things of the spirit in contrast to this world and things of the flesh; and [3] for self-definition and to distinguish themselves individually and as a community from other believers and religious movements.³⁹ Peter Brown argues that many were attracted to a celibate lifestyle because they believed that this form of self-denial elevated and refined their receptivity to the Holy Spirit and served as a higher form of devotion to the Lord.⁴⁰ Celibacy became the most popular form of self-denial because it was the only natural appetite that could be completely suppressed. Hunger and thirst by contrast, although also practiced by ascetics, could only be suppressed until a point.⁴¹

In terms of purity, the idea of lifelong celibacy took its greatest form in the shape of female virginity and was promulgated through literary works like the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Presented as a virgin heroine, Thecla is celebrated because of her choice of eternal virginity over marriage. Church Fathers like Clement of Rome, Tertullian, and Cyprian supported the idea that celibacy and especially virginity should be praised and revered because practitioners attempted to live a life in imitation of Christ. In fact, towards the end of the second century sexual renunciation became commonplace so that two distinct ways of Christian life could be discerned: the life of a common Christian living in the world and the life of the ascetic living to enhance the spirit over the body.⁴² By the third century sexual continence became so popular that virginity emerged as the ideal way to practice wholehearted devotion to God, and celibacy was understood as a way for those who were previously married to renew their lives and purify themselves of past sins. In other words, sexual restraint both inside and outside of marriage became the dominate form of self-discipline and the ideal way to express one's commitment to God.⁴³

³⁹ Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 66–67.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Body and Society*, 77; see also his chapter on the Desert Fathers 213–40.

⁴¹ Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 71.

⁴² Castelli, "Virginity," 68ff; Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 70–71.

⁴³ Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 73–75.

While the idea that in Christian practice a superior way of life could be achieved through virginity and celibacy over marriage can be traced to some of Jesus' teachings and Pauline thought, the practice of extreme asceticism, especially practices surrounding sexual renunciation, probably had its apex in the East, most notably in Syria.⁴⁴ In Syria, Marcion's teaching of asceticism, for instance, was so rigid that it has often been dubbed encratite since it involves not only abstinence from sexual intercourse, eating flesh, and drinking wine, but also the total rejection of marriage and the understanding of all sexual unions as defiling the world.⁴⁵ In accordance with the appeal of ascetic practices in Syrian culture, Tatian is also known for his promotion of the practice of asceticism, denouncing marriage as defilement and fornication, even condemning procreation.⁴⁶ Mani, who also gained much support in Syria, was also known for his promotion of sexual abstinence along with other ascetic practices such as vegetarianism, avoidance of wine, avoidance of certain kinds of work, and even extended periods of fasting.⁴⁷

The Egyptian desert also served ascetics as an ideal place to combat the material world and deal with struggles between the flesh and spirit. The late third century desert father Anthony,⁴⁸ for instance, lived as a hermit in the Egyptian desert and sought to reduce the physical demands of life by living in harsh conditions and following a strict diet in order to aid in the suppression of sexual urges that were present in the civilized and very material world.⁴⁹ Indeed, expressions of asceticism in the form of monasti-

⁴⁴ Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973): 1–19.

⁴⁵ Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 6; see also discussion in Chapter Five and references and notes therein.

⁴⁶ Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2004), 11–12. Hans W.J. Drijvers sees the *Apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas* (i.e., *Acts of Thomas*) and other writings under the name Judas Thomas such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, as rooted in Tatianic Asceticism and theological concepts, suggesting that all the Thomas Writings betray a Syrian provenance. The "bizarre Gospel quotations," Drijvers argues, are related to Tatian's Diatessaron and confirm his considerable influence; Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; New York: Routledge, 1992), 132–33. Cf. also Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East, The Origin of Asceticism Early Monasticism in Persia*, vol. 1 (Louvain: SCSCO, 1958), 35 ff.

⁴⁷ For a good treatment of Mani's thoughts and practices see Samuel N.C. Lieu, *Mandaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1985), 5–54.

⁴⁸ See Robert C. Gregg, ed., *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist, 1980) for notes and a clear translation.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Body and Society*, 213–16 and 223–26; Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 75.

cism gained great prestige in Egypt (e.g., the popularity of cenobitic monasticism there), but so too did the desert fathers in Syria develop an esteemed reputation for practicing celibacy, fasting, and diligent prayer. Sebastian Brock argues that the Syrian practice of asceticism actually held precedence over its Egyptian counterpart, even if it did not gain the same popularity.

Citing Luke's Beatitudes and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man as two of the earliest contributors to the Syrian ascetic tradition, Brock argues they provided the ascetic a plan for attaining discipleship; that is, literally renouncing all material possessions.⁵⁰ Brock suggests that, while not an explicit teaching, Luke 20:35–6, with parallels in Matt 20:30 and Mark 12:25, was extremely influential regarding ascetic ideas concerning marriage; namely, the passage deals with Jesus answering questions posed by some Sadducees about resurrection. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus says, "At the resurrection men and women do not marry; they are like angels in heaven." Luke's parallel passage is significantly different; he writes, "Those who have been judged worthy of a place in the other world, and of the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, for they are not subject to death any longer. They are like angels; they are sons of God, because they share in the resurrection." In other words, Luke implies in his version that those who are worthy of resurrection already participate in the unmarried life in this world and are in this way made equal to angels.⁵¹

Perhaps what is most distinguishable about Syrian asceticism and perhaps most interesting in light of Mary's role as "virgin," "mother," and "wife"⁵² is its close juxtaposition of the "profane world of the married and the 'angelic life' of the ascetics."⁵³ Brown writes that in distinction from the Greek world, which saw the body as a "Platonic echo of an ever-distant spiritual reality," Syrian thought positioned the spiritual and physical world side by side, separated only by a "thin veil."⁵⁴ Accordingly, through extreme self-mortification, the ascetic could assert the "physical freedom of the body from the restraints of normal living" and thus bring the "energy of the angels through the half-translucent curtain that separated the un-

⁵⁰ Four guidelines are explicitly provided by Luke for followers of Christ: [1] no material possessions; [2] no permanent residence; [3] no attachment to family; and [4] bearing his cross daily. Interestingly, no ascetic teachings or guidelines concerning one's diet or marital life are clearly or explicitly expressed in this gospel; Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 3–4.

⁵¹ Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 5–6.

⁵² While Mary is never explicitly referred to as Joseph's wife, she is betrothed/married to him. Refer to the discussion in this chapter.

⁵³ Brown, *Body and Society*, 330.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Body and Society*, 330–31.

seen hosts of Heaven from the present world. Robed in the Holy Spirit, human flesh could do on earth what the angels did in heaven.”⁵⁵

Brock argues that extreme mortification was common practice for Syrian ascetics and unique to their version of asceticism. According to Ephrem, Syrian asceticism was so extreme that it bordered on the extravagant in that the ascetic not only rejected worldly material possessions (e.g., clothing, housing, etc.), but also eagerly participated in activities that physically degraded themselves such as chaining themselves to rocks, yoking their necks with heavy chains, or having themselves imprisoned in cages or cells.⁵⁶ In fact, Brock argues that these extravagancies were in complete contrast to the situation in Egypt, where physical denigration was a rarity. In other words, while asceticism was not a unique practice to Syria nor was it where it gained the most popularity (i.e., Egypt), its extreme and excessive form was very distinctive and may be represented in our text through Mary’s extreme forms of asceticism to maintain her purity (i.e., Mary’s eating and living habits).

Equally important for our study is the emphasis writers placed on virginity as the ideal form of asceticism and its connection to holiness, particularly in light of Mary’s characterization as the “Virgin of the Lord,” as we will see below. For instance, Aphrahat, like Ephrem, confirms that marriage is a lawful and legitimate form of religious expression, but himself practiced and promoted virginity (*btūlā* or *btūltā*) or “single one” (*iħidāyā*) life as the highest form of consecrating one’s life to Christ.⁵⁷ Specifically, Aphrahat argues in his *Demonstrations* 18⁵⁸ that although marriage and childbirth are both good, celibacy and virginity are simply more holy and

⁵⁵ Brown, *Body and Society*, 331.

⁵⁶ E.g., Simeon Stylite, probably the best known and best documented of the Syrian ascetics. For more details on Simeon’s ascetic life and religious practice, see Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, vol. 2, 208 ff; Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 13–17; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “The Stylite’s Liturgy: Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity,” *JECS* 6.3 (1998): 523–39.

⁵⁷ Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 13.

⁵⁸ In his reply to a Jewish critic who accuses him and his fellow Christians of being impure because they “do not take wives,” Aphrahat describes the superiority of celibacy over marriage in terms of the hierarchy of creation and explains that although everything in the world is good because it is made by God, some things are more worthy than others: “And [God] created the heavens and the earth and they are very good, but the heavens are better than the earth. And [God] created the darkness and the light and this is very good, but the light is better than darkness...And [God] created marriage – namely procreation – and this is very good, but virginity is better than it” (Dem 18; 18.8/836.20–837.11). For notes and translation, see Naomi Koltun-Fromm, “Sexuality and Holiness: Semitic Christian and Jewish Conceptualizations of Sexual Behavior,” *VC* 54 (2000): esp. 375–76. The citation format is also taken from Koltun-Fromm who follows Parisot’s text “Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes,” in PS 1.1–2.

worthy and that God prefers them to marriage; for Aphrahat “virginity” is synonymous with “holiness.”⁵⁹ Although this connection between virginity and holiness is not made explicit until the fourth century with the Syrian writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem,⁶⁰ it is not difficult to see that these connections were already taking shape in the second century since, as Brock puts it, virginity “was not only an ideal in the literal sense, but also as a term that could be used in a symbolic way with someone who had preserved himself uncontaminated by the exterior world as a whole.”⁶¹

E. The View of Sexual Purity/Impurity

These cultural and religious views regarding virginity, celibacy, and marriage help locate our narrative’s shift in interest from ritual purity to sexual purity, particularly in light of Mary’s new identification as the “Virgin of the Lord.” Her designation as the *parthenos* at *Prot. Jas.* 9:8 indicates how the treatment of her sexual purity serves to anticipate the text’s claims about her virginal conception and pregnancy as well as her role as Virgin Mother. Especially provocative are the text’s account of three tests of virginity endured by Mary (once privately [*Prot. Jas.* 13–14] and twice publicly [*Prot. Jas.* 15–16; 20]) and its apologetic function in arguing for her continued status as sexually pure, despite her motherhood.⁶²

I. Mary’s Sexual Status and Role as the Virgin of the Lord

As noted, the identification of Mary’s menstrual impurity marks a shift in the narrative whereby the presentation of her purity transitions from being associated with ritual purity and the Temple to being identified by her sexual status as the Lord’s virgin. In order to establish Mary’s sexual status as a *parthenos*, we must return to the narrative’s first depiction of Mary wherein she is described in terms of her virginity, offered to its readers af-

⁵⁹ On how Aphrahat builds his argument for equating virginity with holiness, see especially Koltun-Fromm, “Sexuality and Holiness,” 383–85.

⁶⁰ Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 11. See further my discussion of Ephrem and asceticism in Chapter Five.

⁶¹ Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 11.

⁶² Although the tests Mary endures serve to prove her sexual purity, the concern for her moral purity is also evoked by the accusations made about her pregnancy. The act of participating in sexual relations allows for the possibility for Mary to be associated with sin, and therefore moral impurity. It is only in the context of Mary’s sexual purity that an interest in moral purity is addressed throughout the entire narrative. As such, moral purity will be discussed below in relation to sexual sin and impurity only where applicable, but not as a section on its own.

ter she is asked to leave the Temple because of her impending menstruation. The narrative establishes a scenario whereby Mary's sexual purity will continue to be safeguarded, despite her removal from the Temple precinct, by presenting Joseph, an elderly widower, as her chosen caretaker. At this critical point in the narrative Mary is described to Joseph as a Virgin of the Lord by the high priest. This explicit characterization of Mary advances the narrative on two accounts: first, the designation is given to Mary by those who are associated with the Temple, thus bestowed on her from those who know her best and with whom she really belongs;⁶³ second, the description marks Mary's transition into her new role and thus foregrounds her virginity as the purity with which she will now be most closely associated.

Prior to her designation as the Virgin of the Lord, Mary's purity was dependent upon the protection of the sacred walls created by her mother and the holy sanctuary itself. In this way, the literary space in which Mary dwelled provided her protection as long as she remained within those boundaries. The moment the narrative shifts to the high priest's description of Mary based on her sexual status as a *parthenos*, however, the sacred walls symbolizing the boundaries of safe and unsafe grounds expand to include all narrative spaces; that is, Mary is protected by God simply by her new role as His Virgin. Just as these geographic boundaries previously enclosed her, the literary language and structure of the text also serve to define a protective barrier from sexual pollution as long as she carries with her the title bestowed upon her by the priests. A close examination of Mary's actions and the events that occur immediately after she is given this new status reinforce this idea.

After the narrative describes Mary as the Virgin of the Lord and given into the care and protection of Joseph, despite his reluctance (*Prot. Jas.* 9:7), the first dialogue between them presents Joseph's announcement that he plans on leaving her alone, but under the protection of the Lord (*Prot. Jas.* 9:11). This exchange may strike the reader as odd since Joseph is specifically charged with her care by the high priest. As discussed in Chapter Three, since women are always under male guardianship and the purpose of Jewish marriages in antiquity involve the transference but also protection of a father to a husband,⁶⁴ Joseph's actions betray not only his commitment to the priests but more importantly, the reality of his relationship

⁶³ See discussion on how Mary is described in terms of a Temple sacrifice and how the narrative sets up the reader not to question Mary's sojourn in the Temple, but rather to expect it, in Chapter Two.

⁶⁴ Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 78. See also discussion in Chapter Three on the nature of Mary's and Joseph's marriage.

with Mary. In other words, this marriage is not real in the traditional sense or for the traditional purpose in accordance with biblical law.

Though Joseph's stated intention to leave her alone at first is, of course, a bit unnerving, the reader is immediately comforted by the fact that Joseph's last words to Mary transfers responsibility for her care to the Lord. The author carefully replaces the physical protection of her bedroom-turned-sanctuary, the sacred walls of the Temple, and Joseph's humble home with the ultimate referent, that of safety in the Lord. In fact, as the language physically and metaphorically pushes her from Temple and home, it simultaneously opens a new linguistic space for her by invoking the powerful concept of the Virgin of the Lord. In fact, Mary's new status as the Lord's Virgin may explain the setting of the next episode. Outside the sanctuary of her own home, the sacred space of the Jerusalem Temple, or even Joseph's house, Mary is described in the foreign space of the outside world fetching some water: "And she took her pitcher and went out to fill it with water" (*Καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν καλπίν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν γειώσαι ὕδωρ; Prot. Jas.* 11:1), an almost unimaginable occurrence earlier in the text.

In ancient literature, as Foskett rightly observes, the outside environment offers the greatest threat to women; hence those who have something to jeopardize (i.e., their virginity) are safer when kept indoors.⁶⁵ For Mary to be outside on her own leaves her vulnerable and unprotected not only from the impurities of the outside world, but also from physical danger, especially for one designated as a *parthenos*. The major threats at hand are, of course, rape, seduction, and the loss of one's virginity. For instance, Susanna finds herself in the middle of sexual harassment and blackmail when she bathes outdoors in the privacy (or lack thereof) of her own garden (*Sus* 15–17). 2 Macc 3:19 and 3 Macc 1:18 both attest to the necessity of keeping virgins indoors and thus out of view of sexually dangerous men, since even gazing upon a virgin body could evoke uncontrollable male sexual desire. In his *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian too confirms the power of the virgin body to induce sexual desire, even by means of a gaze, by defending strongly the requirement that virgins must be veiled both in the public arena and during Christian worship (*Virg.* 2). Clearly, for any other *parthenos*, being exposed to the outside world is risky, but fortunately for Mary, no threat exists because, as the author makes clear, she is the "Virgin of the Lord," free from dependence upon the physical protection of sacred walls.

⁶⁵ Foskett also cites popular Greco-Roman novels from the Second Sophistic era (50–250 CE) including *Leucippe and Clitophon* and *Daphnis and Chloe* that also attest to the danger placed on girls, especially virginal ones, when situated in an outside environment. See Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 50–51, 152.

The author further foregrounds the significance of Mary's new status by presenting a heavenly voice that greets her and signals that all is safe (*Prot. Jas.* 11:2). Mary's reaction to the unknown voice, however, is frightened, immediately followed by a decision to return home. Although the reader fully understands the kind of protection afforded one designated as the Lord's Virgin, the *Protevangelium of James'* Mary is presented by the narrator as still being unsure. Such uncertainty seems to reflect the author's desire to reinforce Mary's earthly qualities; although special, she is still very much human and reacts as most would to strange voices speaking to them.

Only within the comfort of her own home, then, Mary again encounters not only a heavenly voice, but the arrival of a heavenly messenger who informs her that she is the favoured one, that God is with her, and that she "will conceive by means of his word" (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5 συλλήψει ἐκ λόγου αὐτοῦ.) In other words, if there were any question concerning what Mary's role as "Virgin of the Lord" will entail, the messenger leaves no room for doubt. However, before Mary commits to her new role, she expresses concern and once again reveals the author's intention to emphasize her normality just as the language seeks to lift her to an unprecedented height as potential mother of God. Like the Mary in Luke who is doubtful (cf. Luke 1:34),⁶⁶ the Mary of the *Protevangelium of James* also questions the messenger: "Mary doubted in herself, saying, 'Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God, and give birth as all women give birth?' (Μαρία διεκρίθη ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγουσα· Εἰ ἔγὼ συλλήψομαι ἀπὸ κυρίου θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ γεννήσω ὡς πᾶσα γυνὴ γεννᾷ; *Prot. Jas.* 11:6).

Mary's direct discourse here, as she questions the messenger, marks a significant moment since this is the first time in the text we are privy to the protagonist's voice. Up until this point Mary's character has been determined by altero-characterization – by descriptions provided by other characters closest to her – so when Mary speaks, the narrator breaks his pattern, providing information about Mary by allowing her to self-characterize.⁶⁷ She thus emerges as a thinking character at this moment as the narrator presents her wondering about how she is like – and unlike – ordinary women. Although the reader anticipates the messenger's response

⁶⁶ For a discussion and commentary on Mary's questioning of the angelic messenger on her condition in Luke's account, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 289; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 348–49; François Bovon, *Luke I: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 51–53.

⁶⁷ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1987). See also Manfred Jahn, *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative* (May 28, 2005): 53 (N7 Characters and Characterization).

that Mary will conceive by no ordinary means since her own birth seemed to occur under miraculous conditions, the dialogue between Mary and the heavenly messenger complicates a seemingly simple narrative in two ways. First, the messenger's response clarifies for Mary that though she is a woman and potentially able to contract ritual impurities in the way other women do (i.e., menstrual impurities force her to leave the Temple), she will in fact not give birth in the expected manner. Instead, the messenger informs Mary that the conception will take place in this way: "for the power of God will overshadow you" (δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐπισκιάσει σοι; *Prot. Jas.* 11:7).

The messenger confirms that because Mary has been blessed among women and has been chosen to conceive by the Lord, the child whom she will name Jesus, which means "he will save his people from their sins," (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν) will be called "son of the most high" (κληθήσεται υἱὸς ὑψίστου) (*Prot. Jas.* 11:7–8).⁶⁸ Second, the dialogue establishes an opportunity for Mary to respond directly to this news in the manner that only a Virgin of the Lord would, that is, by instantly accepting the heavenly message and declaring herself to be the Lord's servant. Although the attributes that make Mary worthy of such an important role are only portrayed to the reader by means of her behaviour and by the testimony of secondary characters thus far, Mary's emphatic verbal acceptance of her new role as the Lord's Virgin strengthens the idea that she is indeed special. The direct speech between Mary and the heavenly messenger makes clear to the reader that Mary is no ordinary woman and that she will conceive and give birth to a child unlike any other. In other words, the narrative implies that since all conceptions and pregnancies involve sexual intercourse, and thus, sexual impurities, Mary's experience with conception and giving birth will not involve any of the aforementioned requirements.

Mary's sexual status as a virgin becomes increasingly important hereafter in the text as demonstrated by her identification as the Virgin of the Lord and her direct speech with the Lord's messenger. The narrative's shift in focus from Mary's ritual purity to sexual purity is further demonstrated by the emphasis placed on presenting Mary as maintaining as well as proving her sexual purity in the second part of the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 12–20), especially since she has been specifically told that her experience with conception and childbirth will not be like any other. Mary's virginity tests

⁶⁸ This verse is an exact quotation from Matt 1:21, but with the important difference of being addressed to Mary instead of Joseph. In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary, not Joseph, is instructed to name the child Jesus. As a narrative completely devoted to praising Mary and making her the center of attention, it is only fitting that Mary takes on the active role as recipient of such heavenly messages.

occupy and dominate all the major plot points of the second half of the narrative, foregrounding the narrative's new focus: Mary's sexual purity and status as a *parthenos*.

The narrative's shift in focus, however, is not unwarranted. The narrator obviously provides hints about the importance of Mary's sexual purity by alluding earlier to her awareness and observance of ritual purity, but not so obviously by the actions of her parents who also conceive Mary in a miraculous fashion.⁶⁹ Before Mary's sexual purity can be discussed by looking to the three tests that she must endure, an analysis of the manner in which Mary herself is conceived is worth investigating in order to shed light on the significance of her own sexual purity. Namely, if Mary's own conception involved the miraculous – that is, her birth was not the result of a sexual union between her mother and father – how much more significant, meaningful, and even explanatory would Mary's conception of her child as a virgin be. In other words, Anna's sexless conception of Mary is continued by Mary's sustained virginity before, during, and after the conception and birth of her child Jesus.

II. The Miraculous Conception of Mary

Concerning Mary's conception, we are told that despite their wealth and prominence in the community and their constant display of righteousness and piety, Mary's parents fail to produce an Israelite child, but that in the absence of her husband and after a deep-hearted lament, Anna is visited by a messenger of the Lord with the news that her prayers have been heard and that "You will conceive and give birth, and your offspring will be spoken of in the whole world" (συλλήψει καὶ γεννήσεις καὶ λαληθήσεται τὸ σπέρμα σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ; *Prot. Jas.* 4:1).

The two verbs "to conceive" (συλλαμβάνω) and "to give birth" (γεννάω) merit further consideration. Both verbs are in the future tense and allow the possibility for Joachim to be a participant in Anna's conception. The logic is simply that Anna *will* conceive when she and her husband Joachim are together in the future. The details surrounding this event, however, seem to suggest otherwise and support the idea of a miraculous conception.⁷⁰ Immediately after Anna is given the news that she is with

⁶⁹ Paul Foster, "The Protevangelium of James," *Exptim* 118.12 (2007): 576; idem, "The Protevangelium of James," in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 113–16.

⁷⁰ For a contrary position, see Beverly R. Gaventa who argues for reading the conception of Mary as one that developed out of a sexual union between Anna and Joachim (*Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 112). Gaventa does not base her argument on the conflicting manuscripts that testify to different tenses for the word "conceive"; that is, whether Anna *will* conceive in the future tense or has

child, the narrator informs us that two messengers approach her informing her that Joachim is coming with his flocks because an angel of the Lord came down to him with the news that the Lord had heard his prayer. Joachim is told specifically by the messenger the following: "Behold, your wife Anna has conceived/is pregnant" (ἰδού ἡ γυνὴ σου "Ἄννα ἐν γαστρὶ εἴληφεν/λήψεται; *Prot. Jas.* 4:3).⁷¹ The manuscripts differ whether Joachim is told that Anna *will* conceive λήψεται (future tense) or that she *is* pregnant or *has* conceived εἴληθεν (perfect tense). H.R. Smid argues that those who side with the possibility of a future tense meaning do so based on the description of Joachim's actions when he finally returns home: And Joachim "rested" (ἀναπάυω; *Prot. Jas.* 4:10) the first day home.⁷² The sexual connotation of the word "rested" has convinced some that Joachim indeed is a physical participant in his wife's pregnancy, but Joseph's "resting" takes place after Anna has already announced that she is pregnant at *Prot. Jas.* 4:8 (the perfect tense εἴληφει is again used here). The textual evidence appears to favour the perfect form, since the earlier

conceived in the perfect tense. She argues that since the perfect tense can connote both an event that has just passed (Anna has conceived) and a present action (Anna conceived), determining the proper meaning cannot be dependent upon tense. Gaventa continues to argue that it is more likely that Anna and Joachim engaged in marital relations and that the birth of Mary occurred in a normal and usual fashion based on the interpretation that Anna and Joachim endured a long period of childlessness and shame from their own people. I argue, however, that though it is likely Anna and Joachim had sexual relations in the past, Mary's birth was not the result of this union, but rather the will of God. The narrative seems to emphasize that the marital relations in which Anna and Joachim engaged in the past could not and did not result in the birth of their child. Instead, the miraculous birth that would be bestowed on the couple was based on their righteousness, ritual purity, and piety. This idea is supported in the chronology of the news; namely, Anna is reported to have been pregnant before she has any physical contact with her husband. It is also reinforced again with Joachim's constant references to having been forgiven for all his sins and Anna's complete need to embody everything that affects Mary in terms of purity. In addition, the textual evidence seems to support the perfect form, since the earlier Greek manuscripts also attest to this reading.

⁷¹ Following Ronald F. Hock, who follows Émile de Strycker, I have selected the form εἴληφα over C. Tischendorf's λήψομαι.

⁷² For a contrary opinion see H.R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 41, who argues "nothing in the context points in the direction of εἴληθεν (perfect tense)...so that λήψεται (future tense) is to be preferred." This reading, though possible, seems unlikely because when this word "rested" is used a second time in the narrative in 15:2 in reference to Joseph and Mary, there is no sexual ambiguity in its meaning. In support of the perfect tense, Hock has suggested that it is likely that the author understood Mary to have also been the product of a miraculous conception based on his unwavering description of Mary's purity; *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 39 n. 4:4. See also Foster, "Protevangelium of James," 576.

Greek manuscripts attest to this reading.⁷³ The idea that Anna was already pregnant by miraculous means is also supported by the author's emphasis on Mary's purity, and by association, her parent's purity.

Examining the order in which the events unfold further supports the idea that Anna's pregnancy was also the product of a miraculous conception. In this sequence of events, Joachim is given the news that his wife is pregnant before he returns to her from the wilderness (*Prot. Jas.* 4:3–4). His reaction upon hearing this announcement is revealing, offering narrative evidence of his non-participation in Anna's conception. Even before Joachim returns to Anna, he gathers his shepherds and instructs them to prepare the gift offering for the proper sacrifices as a reaction to the news of his already pregnant wife. If Joachim did not believe that his wife was already with child, his actions would be considered premature. Celebrations do not occur until there is confirmation that there is something to celebrate. But Joachim's initial response to the news is not in vain as his first meeting with his wife confirms that she is indeed already pregnant. After Joachim returns with his flocks, Anna is described as running to him with this news: "Now I know that the Lord God has greatly blessed me. For behold, the widow is no longer a widow, and behold, she who was childless has conceived" (Νῦν δίδα ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς εὐλόγησέν με σφόδρα· ἴδου γὰρ ἡ χήρα οὐκέτι χήρα, καὶ ἡ ἀτεκνός ἴδου ἐν γαστρὶ εἴληφα; *Prot. Jas.* 4:9). The gifts once rejected by the childless Joachim now become the accepted and celebrated offerings of a fruitful father to all the people of Israel.

Interestingly, upon relaying the angelic message of being pregnant to Joachim, Anna announces that, "the Lord God has greatly blessed me" (κύριος ὁ θεὸς εὐλόγησέν με σφόδρα; *Prot. Jas.* 4:9). If the miraculous pregnancy indeed involved Joachim, Anna's response should have involved a blessing that was given to both her and Joachim. But as the text stands, Anna alone has been given the blessing of the Lord to conceive a child "who will be talked about all over the world" (*Prot. Jas.* 4:1). Joachim functions only as an observer in the events concerning the birth of Mary. Unlike Elkannah who is explicitly said to have "known his wife Hannah (1 Sam 1:19)" when the Lord remembered her and blessed her with a child, there is no mention of Joachim "knowing his wife Anna" when she is given news that her prayers have been answered.⁷⁴ The angelic

messenger only visits Joachim after Anna is given the news that she is already pregnant. Although Joachim may share in Anna's blessing, he is not himself directly responsible for Anna's pregnancy.

Also significant is the *Protevangelium of James'* use of συλλαμβάνω meaning, "to conceive," which is also used in the birth story of Isaac (Gen 21:2–3), Samuel (1 Sam 1:20), and Luke's version of Mary's conception. The term used to render the meaning of "giving birth" in Gen 21:2–3, 1 Sam 1:20, Isa 7:14, Matt 1:23, and Luke 1:31, however, is the word τίκτω, but the *Protevangelium of James* instead uses the word γεννάω for both Anna's and Mary's announcements.⁷⁵ γεννάω is often the term used in genealogies to describe a family line and usually renders the meaning, "begat." This word is also most commonly used for describing a family line through the father, and very rarely denotes lineage through a mother, as illustrated even in the genealogies offered by Matthew (1:1–17).

In the Septuagint, γεννάω is used 276 times and in 263 cases it renders a "begat" connotation.⁷⁶ Of the 276 times the term is used, there are 239 cases in which it is employed to describe a family line through the father. Significantly, then, when the angel delivers the news to Anna of her conception, he uses the word γεννάω instead of τίκτω. If Joachim is not physically responsible for his wife's pregnancy, then Mary's family line must come from her mother. If this is the case, the use of γεννάω to describe Anna's conception only reinforces the idea that her conception and birth of Mary was miraculous and done so without Joachim's help, thus confirming the idea that Mary's subsequent extreme sexual purity was first initiated by the sexual purity⁷⁷ maintained by her mother Anna during her

participation in Anna's conception of Mary and by emphasizing that it was done in a natural way. See Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Le *Protévangile de Jacques* latin dans l'homélie *Inquirendum est pour la fête de la Nativité de Marie*," *Apocrypha* 12 (2001): 142–44.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Prot. Jas.* 14:6 where the word τίκτω is used by the messenger to describe to Joseph the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy.

⁷⁶ The 13 cases in which γεννάω does not render the meaning "begat" is when there are variants in the Codices on which the Septuagint is based (i.e., Codex Alexandrinus; Codex Vaticanus' Codex Sinaiticus; Sixtine Edition of 1687). The word more commonly used is γίγνομαι meaning "to become," though there are instances such as the 13 cited above, whereby a variant word is attested, which in this case is γεννάω, the causal of γίγνομαι. The Hebrew terms that γεννάω typically translate into include: בָּרָה = makes, shape, create; גַּדֵּל = to grow up, become great, bring up children; הִתְהַנֵּן = to become; to conceive, become pregnant; הִזְלַח = to be brought forth; לְלַח = to beget, bear, bring forth; נִזְקַנֵּת = to acquire, get; מִזְבֵּח = to put, place, set.

⁷⁷ By "sexual purity," I refer specifically to the case of Anna's conception of Mary; that is, Joachim and Anna did not participate in sexual intercourse to bring about the birth of their child. This is not an argument, however, that Anna was a virgin or that she practiced celibacy.

⁷³ Foster, "Protevangelium of James," 576 and de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 80.

⁷⁴ Cf. the ninth or tenth century homily *Inquirendum est*, a Latin text composed for the feast of the Nativity of Mary which transmits the first eight chapters of the *Protevangelium of James*. In the Latin transmission of the *Protevangelium of James* the manner in which Anna conceives Mary is problematized by being explicit about Joachim's partici-

conception and continued in her decision to wait before breastfeeding Mary. The reference to γεννών may also suggest why the detail of Mary being of Davidic descent is repeatedly referenced throughout the narrative, making clear that the child Jesus is born of a virginal woman directly of the Davidic line.⁷⁸ In this way, Mary's genealogical purity is as important as her ritual, menstrual and sexual purity for determining her selection by God as the mother of Christ.

III. Pre-Testing

Anna's miraculous conception of Mary then aids in affirming the case for Mary's sexual purity throughout the text. Once Mary is given the status of being the Lord's Virgin, however, the narrative's focus becomes increasingly occupied with establishing and proving Mary's virginity, by describing a series of tests to prove that Mary is indeed sexually pure and has in fact been impregnated by the Holy Spirit. I suggest that these tests are designed to question whether Mary has remained true to her status as the "Virgin of the Lord" despite taking on the role of "wife" to Joseph, and has remained a virgin before, during, and after giving birth. I contend that the text employs a strategic narrative device to set up Mary to be tested (once privately [*Prot. Jas.* 13–14] and twice publicly [*Prot. Jas.* 15–16; 20]) in order for her to announce in her own voice her state of sexual purity. As noted, the first time the author allows Mary to verbalize her own thoughts (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6), the issue at hand is whether she will conceive as other women, i.e., her sexual status as a virgin. So when Mary is again given the opportunity to further her own characterization by means of direct discourse at critical plot points, the significance of Mary's sexual purity for the narrative becomes even more emphatic.

Before the first test is conducted to confirm Mary's virginal condition, the author inserts two short scenes, one describing the high priest praising Mary for finishing her spinning of the purple and scarlet threads, and the other recounting Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. These two scenes serve to prepare the reader for Mary's triple testing on several levels. First, both scenes cast an even brighter light on the circumstances of Mary's condition and the importance and significance of the child who dwells within her. In particular, the two scenes remind the reader that Mary is indeed blessed, but also honourable as spinning was the traditional role for

the virtuous woman.⁷⁹ Moreover, both blessings also serve to recall to the reader that Mary is most deserving of praise due to her extreme purity as exemplified by her new status as the Lord's Virgin. Second, the author's positioning of the two blessings immediately before Mary's first accusation sets up a literary confrontation whereby Mary's reputation must be defended. The reader's privileged knowledge about Mary's condition, still unbeknownst to the other characters, allows the narrator to evoke from the reader an accurate assessment of unfolding events – namely, the accusations made against Mary are false. But, more importantly, the combination of blessings and repeated appeals to Mary's virginity offered by the two short scenes discussed above, positioned immediately before accusations claiming otherwise, results in a perfect scenario for Mary to defend herself and, significantly, in her own voice.

F. The Virginity Tests

In what follows, I hope to show that the narrative's focus on Mary's sexual purity can succinctly be read in what I have called Mary's three virginity tests below. Notably, it is in the context of defending her sexual purity that Mary's voice is significantly heard in the text. It is to these three "virginity tests" that we will now turn to further demonstrate the *Protevangelium of James'* overarching interest in purity in its multiple and various forms.

I. Test One: Joseph Questions Mary's Pregnancy

Only after the narrator provides sufficient data for his readers to bring together, assess, and construct an accurate impression of Mary's character does the testing of Mary's virginity begin. After spending three months with Elizabeth,⁸⁰ Mary decides to return to her home in order to hide her swelling womb from the people of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 12:7). The narrator reports that Mary was sixteen years of age when these mysterious occurrences begin happening to her.⁸¹ At home, Joseph, Mary's own protector

⁷⁹ Hock also notes the dangers of being "outside" and assesses Mary's quick return home to her work of weaving scarlet and purple threads as a need to return quickly to a "posture of purity and innocence"; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 26, 53 n. 11:4.

⁸⁰ The precise date of three months is most likely adapted from Luke's description of Mary's stay for three months (Luke 1:56).

⁸¹ There has been much discussion and debate regarding the age given for Mary when these events were unfolding before her, since the manuscripts differ considerably. Smid notes that the majority of manuscripts put Mary at the age of sixteen, which, if taking into consideration Mary's age at *Prot. Jas.* 8:3, places Joseph away from the home for four years. The ages of twelve, fourteen, fifteen and seventeen have also been attested

⁷⁸ Church Fathers who, like the *Protevangelium of James*, attributed to Mary a Davidic origin include Ignatius (*Ign. Eph.* 18.2) and Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 45.4).

the Lord as soon as he officially receives her from the Temple. Joseph's decision to take Mary home originally is based on the high priest's threat and Joseph's desire to please him and the community (*Prot. Jas.* 9:11). Since from the start the text establishes that Joseph knows that Mary belongs to the Lord, when he arrives home and reacts harshly to her condition, he does so to accomplish the author's purpose of providing an occasion in the text for a test to show that she is truly innocent and has still maintained her state of purity, more specifically her virginity. A full citation of the three tests will prove useful, starting with Joseph's questioning of Mary, which unfolds as follows:

13:6 And Joseph stood up from the sackcloth and called her [Mary] and said to her, "You who God cared for, why have you done this? Have you forgotten the Lord your God? Why have you humbled your soul, you who were brought up in the Holy of Holies and who received food from the hand of an angel?"

13:6 Καὶ ἀνέστη Ἰωσὴφ ἀπὸ τοῦ σάκκου καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Μεμελημένη θεῶ, τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; ἐπελάθου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου; τί ἐπαπέινωσας τὴν ψυχήν σου, ἡ ἀνατραφεῖσα εἰς τὰ ἄγια τῶν ἀγίων καὶ τροφὴν λαμβάνουσα ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλου;

The irony of Joseph's harsh questions, of course, is that all the reasons he supplies regarding why Mary should not have committed any acts against God (i.e., God cared specifically for her, etc.,) are the precise reasons why Mary has not participated in any of these activities. More importantly, the questions posed involve a concern not only for her sexual purity but for her innocence as well, thus suggesting the fear that her moral purity is also in danger. In this way, Mary's virginity tests involve what Hayes has coined "carnal impurity" since the accusation entails not only ritual and moral impurity, but also an impurity of the flesh caused by the sexual act itself.

As the Virgin of the Lord, Mary is under the Lord's care and protection, so when faced with these accusations, her initial response is to claim her innocence: "I am pure, and I do not know a man" (*καθαρά εἰμι ἔγω καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω*; *Prot. Jas.* 13:8). *καθαρός* is one of the most common Greek terms for "purity," and although used only three times throughout the entire narrative, it appears at extremely critical points in the text. Mary's self-spoken declaration that she is indeed pure (*καθαρά εἰμι ἔγω*) marks the word's first appearance in the narrative.⁸³

⁸³ Of the 158 times *καθαρός* is cited in the Septuagint, 72 times is it used in reference to ritual purity; namely, it deals with being ceremonially and sacrificially pure and clean; only twice is *καθαρός* employed to denote sexual impurity (Lev 5:28; Wis 14:24). Other usage for the term "pure" is in the metaphorical sense; that is, it is used as a synonym for "good" (i.e., Job 4:7), "innocent" (Gen 20:5), "holy" (Isa 65:5), and even "righteous" (i.e., Job 4:17). *καθαρός* is also used to indicate the quality or perfection of material goods i.e., "pure gold," "pure oil," or "pure brass," etc. Although this meaning of the

and guardian, first pursues a disclosure of Mary's guilt. Upon returning home to find Mary pregnant, Joseph begins to cry bitterly because he is sure that the priests and people of Israel will hold him responsible (*Prot. Jas.* 13:1). Although Joseph handed over responsibility for Mary to the Lord before he left to build houses, he now admits that there is no prayer he can say to remedy the situation as he received her as a "Virgin of the Temple of the Lord God" and has failed in his promise to protect her (*Prot. Jas.* 13:3). Joseph's concern with being held responsible for Mary's condition is noteworthy and reinforces the irregularity of their relationship. Joseph's source of panic is based solely on his failure to protect Mary; he shows no signs that his reaction is the result of Mary's possible infidelity in his absence. In this way, Mary's pregnancy functions not as evidence as a breach in their marriage, but rather his breach in his promise to the priests. Comparing himself to Adam, Joseph suspects that Mary has been deceived and corrupted and decides to confront her, but Mary continues to plead her innocence (*Prot. Jas.* 13:5). The analogy, of course, intends to encourage the interpretation that just as the serpent came and found Eve alone, then deceived and corrupted her, so too has a similar temptation been visited upon Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 13:6 cf. Gen 3:1–20).⁸² Readers are fully aware, however, that this is not the case. In fact, Joseph cannot be blamed for his lack of protection because Mary does not in actuality belong to him, but rather to the Lord as demonstrated by Joseph's quick decision to abandon Mary the moment she is passed to him from the Temple priests. Although Joseph seems to want to accept blame for what he thinks has happened to Mary, he clearly knows that she is not really his responsibility, which explains why he hands over the onus of Mary's protection to

and argued based on differing opinions on what was deemed a marriageable age. Smid admits that the exact time Joseph is away from Mary is difficult to assess (namely how much time has passed between *Prot. Jas.* 9:3 and 13:1), but that the time period could not have been earlier than six months or later than four years based on Mary's visit and stay with Elizabeth according to Luke's records; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 92. In order to make sense of why the author attests to the age of sixteen, de Strycker suggests that the author simply forgot that he had mentioned Mary's age earlier in the text (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3). See de Strycker, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes Critiques et Exégétiques," *SE* 3 (1964): 411. Hock claims that twelve or even fourteen is the most logical age for Mary at this time in her life based on his understanding of the charges that will be later made against Joseph in *Prot. Jas.* 15:3–18; *Infancy Gospel of James*, 55.

⁸² The comparison between Mary and Eve evokes the very popular and much discussed theme of Mary as the Second Eve. Irenaeus of Lyons in his treatises *Against Heresies*, and especially his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, discusses most thoroughly the parallelism of Eve and Mary and his understanding of these two women as the most important women in human history: Eve as the "mother of all living"; Mary as the "mother of Christ." On this see, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 39–52 and notes therein.

Oddly enough, when questioned by Joseph concerning the origin of the child, Mary again forgets her visit from Gabriel (see also *Prot. Jas.* 12:6) and claims that she does not remember (*Prot. Jas.* 13:10). The reason for Mary's forgetfulness is not quite clear,⁸⁴ but on two different occasions, Mary is unable to provide an explanation for her condition, which is particularly telling especially when revealing Gabriel's message would easily clear her name. That these times of "memory lapses" occur before the actual tests seems to suggest that the narrator sought to sustain suspense by building up to the questioning that transpires. If Mary simply remembered Gabriel's words she would have no need to declare her complete innocence.⁸⁵ Mary's response that "I am pure" (*καθαρά εἰμι ἔγώ*; *Prot. Jas.* 13:8) is her declaration that she is innocent of the charges laid before her concerning her virginity. Thus, Mary's memory lapse seems to be a narrative device used with the purpose to allow for further confirmation of her sexual purity.

In addition, though Mary is the *Protevangelium of James'* sole protagonist, she ironically speaks only on five different occasions throughout the entire narrative. More often than not, Mary is the object of the sentence and is regularly "moved around"⁸⁶ by the narrator and other characters; the narrator repeatedly describes her actions and interactions with other char-

term involves measurements, it also applies to ritual purity in that certain materials are deemed worthy and ritually pure to be used in the making of sacred objects, i.e., the inside and outside of the ark of the covenant is made with pure gold (*Exod* 25:11). Interestingly, of the 11 times *καθαρός* is cited in the NT, seven times is it used as a synonym for "good," whereas only twice does it relate to ritual purity; i.e., certain items need to be clean. As the term *καθαρός* has a variety of connotations, it is not surprising that it tends to translate into a number of different terms. Such Hebrew terms include: בָּר = pure; צְדָקָה = pure or clean in a moral sense; טָהֹר = good; טָהֹר = to be ceremonially clean and pure; שָׁרֵךְ = to be upright, straight, pleasing to God; מְכָלָה = perfection i.e., gold; מְקַרְבָּה = cleansing (away evil); נְטִילָה = clean or empty; נְטִילָה = exempt from guilt or innocent; טָהֹרָה = holy, cleansed; מְכָלָה = perfection, completeness, etc. Noteworthy is the fact that *καθαρός* more often than not translates into purity in a ritual sense. But in Mary's first declaration of her purity (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8), the technical language of ritual purity gets transferred to connote a sexual sense, as is the case with the only other two times this term is employed in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 15:13; 15:15).

⁸⁴ Although Mary's "forgetfulness" can also be interpreted as a way for the author to stress Mary's humanness in that it is often human nature to forget what we should remember, it seems that the purpose of Mary's lapse in memory here and in the earlier scene at *Prot. Jas.* 12:6 reflects the author's desire to have her declare her innocence, since the placement of Mary's forgetfulness occurs significantly before a test.

⁸⁵ Indeed, if Mary could simply remember, she could move beyond simply stating her innocence to offering real testimony. The author's decision to declare her innocence plainly, however, seems to be motivated by his desire to make Mary's words emphatic.

⁸⁶ E.g., Mary is often described in the passive or past tense, rather than showing her own agency in controlling her actions.

acters and thus her voice is only heard through the mouths of others. The first time Mary speaks, however, is when she is questioning the manner in which she will give birth (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6). Ironically, Mary's voice is active, unreserved, and very much in control – and quite the opposite of what one would expect given her previously passive presence in the narrative. The second time Mary speaks, she accepts Gabriel's message, affirms and accepts the role he proclaims, and declares that she is indeed, "the servant of the Lord" (*ἡ δούλη κυρίου*; *Prot. Jas.* 11:9). The third time Mary's voice is heard is when she declares her purity before Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8–10). These rare moments of direct discourse assure that each utterance takes on special significance; for example, Mary's questioning and then acceptance of Gabriel's message clearly demonstrate her active involvement in discovering and understanding her condition.

Though Mary may have "forgotten" the mysteries that the heavenly angel Gabriel spoke to her, the narrator provides hints that Mary does indeed comprehend her situation, which is why she is able to fully and faithfully attest to her sexual purity and innocence. This idea is supported further by two different details in the narrative. First, when Mary speaks for the fourth time in the narrative, she again declares her innocence and her maintained state of sexual purity, but this time before the high priest: "as the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know a man" (*Ζῆτε οὐκέτι καθαρά εἰμι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γνωσκώ*; *Prot. Jas.* 15:13). Second, when Joseph is pondering what to do with her, he concludes there are only two options before he finally decides to divorce her quietly: [1] to hide her sin; and [2] to show her to the children of Israel. Joseph fears both options since the former will place him in opposition to the law of the Lord (*τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου*), but the latter risks the possibility that the child inside of her is angelic (*ἄγγελικόν ἔστιν τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ*) and that "I will be found handing over innocent blood to the judgment of death" (*εὑρεθήσομαι παραδίδοὺς ἀθώον αἷμα εἰς κρίμα θανάτου*; *Prot. Jas.* 14:2).

Mary gives no hints to Joseph that the child is in fact heaven-sent and that it was the angel Gabriel who delivered this message. So when the narrator presents Joseph considering the possibilities of Mary's sin or angelic intervention, he either coincidentally posits the latter reason for her pregnancy or he actually knows of Mary's innocence, but must question her so that she can declare her innocence and purity before the world. Of course, when Joseph decides that he will divorce Mary quietly, another angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream to tell him not to be afraid because the child she carries is in fact the doing of the Holy Spirit. Only after receiving confirmation of Mary's innocence is Joseph willing to protect her and the child (*Prot. Jas.* 14:8).

The author's careful structuring of Mary's character as pure makes her very few examples of direct discourse of "I am pure" (καθαρά εἰμι ἔγώ; *Prot. Jas.* 13:8) emphatic. For example, this purity is emphasized by means of the setting (e.g., sacred space of her home-made sanctuary to the sacred Temple); plot (e.g., Mary's maintained purity during her immaculate upbringing to her interactions with the Temple priests to her living arrangements with Joseph); action (e.g., Anna's decisions to prevent Mary from walking on common ground, or from touching, eating, or contacting anything or anyone profane or unclean, and Anna's participation in post-partum pollution to prevent ritual pollution from making contact with her daughter); and speech i.e., character traits attributed to Mary through the mouths of other characters (e.g., the priests' blessings and description of her as being "pure in the eyes of God" (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4)). Indeed, as the author makes quite clear, Mary's purity serves as the foundation for her characterization and the focal point of the narrative as a whole as the language of purity continues to dominate the text.

II. Test Two: The High Priest Questions Mary's Pregnancy

The references to sexual purity embodied in the language of the text continue to serve as a reminder of Mary's sexual purity especially in her second test that occurs almost immediately after she is first accused by Joseph. Here, both Joseph and Mary are challenged when Annas, one of the scholars of their assembly, questions Joseph's absence and notices Mary's condition (*Prot. Jas.* 15:1-4). Joseph's response to Annas' question is "because I was weary from the travels and I rested for one day" (὾τι ἔκαμον ἐκ τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ ἀνεπαυσάμην τὴν μίαν ἡμέραν; *Prot. Jas.* 15:2).⁸⁷ Annas' reaction to Joseph's answer is noteworthy. When re-

⁸⁷ Scholars have debated the author's exact intention for including this piece of information (e.g., Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 41). It is clear that Joseph's response that "he rested" his first day home could have sexual connotations, which is why Annas' reaction is suspicion. The Greek term used here as in *Prot. Jas.* 4:10 is ἀνεπαυώ meaning "to rest," but it can also be used to indicate "lying down." The sexual connotation is possible, but very unlikely given our evidence of its non-sexual meaning at 4:10 and the emphasis on Mary's purity and her platonic relationship with Joseph as made explicit by the high priest's designation of Joseph as "protector." It is my interpretation that the extensive questioning of Mary beforehand is a technique employed by the author to build up the big test made public by the high priest. In support of interpreting Joseph's "rest" as non-sexual is the fact that the last thing we are told of Joseph after he hears directly from the angel that Mary has conceived by the Holy Spirit is that he "began to protect her." This action reminds us about the earlier scene when Joseph is chosen via a sign from God, i.e., a dove rests on Joseph's staff to indicate that he has been chosen to care and protect Mary. The fact that the author alerts us again to Joseph's recommitment to his

porting to the high priests of Mary's pregnant state, Annas refers to her as the "virgin (παρθένος) Joseph received from the Temple of the Lord" (*Prot. Jas.* 15:6) and when describing her condition in order to retrieve her for interrogation and testing, as a "virgin with child" (παρθένον ωγκωμένην; *Prot. Jas.* 15:8). Interestingly, though Annas' accusations of Mary are based on the assumption that she is no longer a virgin, the author insures that the scholar addresses Mary as such on both occasions, perhaps to point out that the paradox of a pregnant virgin is indeed true.

Moreover, Annas' concern for Joseph's serious offence is based on his belief that Joseph defiled Mary, consummated the marriage in secret, and did not reveal his action to the children of Israel (Τὴν παρθένον ἦν ἱωσῆφ παρέλαβεν ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου, ἐμίανεν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐκλεψεν τοὺς γάμους αὐτῆς καὶ οὐκ ἐφανέρωσεν τοῖς νιοῖς Ἰσραὴλ; *Prot. Jas.* 15:6). Annas' second accusation is particularly interesting since it is based on the idea that the marriage between Mary and Joseph is not technically complete since no formal marriage is ever discussed in the narrative (nor is it in any other source as far as I am aware). According to Michael L. Satlow, in the Hebrew Bible betrothals were understood as inchoate marriages that had legal consequences, so that once the betrothal became formally concluded (probably with a payment), the betrothed woman was considered, in some respects, to be married.⁸⁸ The marriage itself and the transfer of the bride from the father's house to the husband's house legally "completed" the marriage. Satlow also notes that if there were a delay between the betrothal and the marriage ceremony (as there usually was) so that it required the bride to continue living at her father's home, she would still be considered a married woman.⁸⁹

How are we then to understand Mary's and Joseph's relationship? Is Mary merely betrothed or is she indeed married? And what does it mean to be betrothed or married? I suggest that the narrative is deliberately ambiguous to reinforce the irregularity of their relationship and to set up Mary's testing. On the one hand, although no marriage ceremony is described, Mary has already been transferred to Joseph's home and is specifically instructed by the messenger of the Lord to be Joseph's wife (*Prot. Jas.* 8:8). Additionally while the author may present the betrothal of Mary and Joseph as a form of inchoate marriage, it is clear that Mary is understood to be fully married so that only divorce or death is required to terminate the marriage, which is precisely what Joseph is said to contemplate after he finds her pregnant (*Prot. Jas.* 14:4). On the other hand, this marriage is

promise to care and protect Mary seems to dismiss the possibility that he "rested" in a sexual way.

⁸⁸ Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 69.

⁸⁹ Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 69.

placed directly in Mary's mouth. As noted above, *καθαρός* can take on various meanings in addition to "purity" as the standard translation; the term has also been used to indicate innocence. In this way, Mary's declaration that "I am pure," not only affirms her sexual purity, but also her innocence against the accusation of participation in sexual impurity and sin.

Unable to respond to Mary's declaration of innocence, the high priest turns to Joseph and asks why he has done this. In the same manner and style as Mary, Joseph's response is that, "As the Lord lives, I am pure regarding her" (*Ζῆ κύριος καθότι καθαρός εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐξ αὐτῆς*; *Prot. Jas.* 15:15). In this third and final time that *καθαρός* is employed in the narrative, the word is now put on Joseph's lips in his denial of the accusations made against him concerning Mary's sexual purity. Earlier in the narrative when Annas first discovers that Mary is pregnant, the serious offence for which Joseph is charged is threefold: that he defiled the Virgin, that he consummated the marriage in secret, and that he did not disclose it to the people of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 15:6).

Interestingly, before the high priest, Joseph's offence becomes fourfold: again there is a concern that Joseph defiled Mary, has had his way with her, and that he did not disclose his action to the people of Israel, but a fourth part is included – namely, that he did not humble himself before God's mighty hand so that the child might be blessed (*καὶ οὐκ ἐκλινας τὴν κεφαλήν σου ὑπὸ τὴν κραταιὰν χειρα ὅπως εὐλογηθῇ τὸ σπέρμα σου*; *Prot. Jas.* 15:17). This curious addition to the list of offences involves the lack of blessings for Mary's child, since much time is spent early in the narrative testifying and affirming that Mary is blessed and that her child is indeed already holy.

The high priest's response to Joseph's silence only heightens in strangeness: "Give back the virgin you received from the Temple of the Lord" (*Ἀπόδος τὴν παρθένον ἣν παρέλαβες ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου*; *Prot. Jas.* 16:1). The obvious question to be asked of the high priest is where is Mary to be returned? To the Temple from which she was once asked to leave? As the "Virgin of the Lord" from the Temple of the Lord, is Mary to reside with the high priest? Though the high priest's intentions by this statement are not clear, his comment remains striking in that he refers to Mary as the Virgin from the Temple of the Lord. Does the priest in fact believe that Mary is still a virgin? The scene contains built-in contradictions since the high priest's intention is to accuse Mary for no longer maintaining her state of sexual purity and yet, without hesitation, he continues to refer to her as a virgin, and not just any virgin, the virgin from the Temple of the Lord. One must question then whether the high priest's true intention lies in actually passing judgement on Mary or simply questioning and testing

obviously not of the traditional sort as discussed in the previous chapter. Mary is not betrothed to Joseph by means of money, contract, or intercourse as the first mishnah in tractate *Qiddushin* states for determining betrothals, nor is she transferred to Joseph's care by her father. Instead Mary's marriage arrangement to Joseph is decided by God via lots and she is transferred to Joseph's home by the Temple priests without any compensation; Joseph actually only agrees to the arrangement out of fear. Most importantly here, sexual relations between Mary and Joseph are clearly not expected – indeed, suspicion of carrying out the sexual act is the reason they must stand trial. Joseph is specifically instructed by the high priest to take Mary into his "care and protection" (*Prot. Jas.* 9:7). Additionally, we are also told in the scene where Joseph must register his family (*Prot. Jas.* 17:2-4) and in his conversation with the Hebrew midwife (*Prot. Jas.* 19:6-8), that he does not know how to refer to Mary and has difficulty identifying her as his wife.

Thus Annas' accusations function to reinforce the unique marriage of Mary and Joseph as well as to set up Mary's test since, as a result, Joseph and Mary are summoned by the high priest to be interrogated. At the court, a series of questions are first directed at Mary alone:

15:10 And the high priest said to her, "Mary, why have you done this? Why have you humiliated your soul and ¹¹forgetting the Lord your God, you who were brought up in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hand of an angel? ¹²You who heard their [the angels] hymns and danced for them, why have you done this? ¹³But she wept bitterly saying, "As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know a man."

15:10 Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἀρχιερεύς· Μαρία, τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; τί ἐταπείνωσας τὴν ψυχήν σου; ¹¹Ἐπελάθου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου, ἡ ἀνατραφεῖσα εἰς τὰ ἄγια τῶν ἀγίων καὶ λαβούσα τροφὴν ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλων; ¹²σὺ ή ἀκούσασα τῶν ὑμνῶν αὐτῶν καὶ χορεύσασα ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν, τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; ¹³Η δὲ ἐκλαυσε πικρῶς λέγουσα· Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός καθότι καθαρά εἰμι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω.

Although the purpose of the investigation is to question why Mary has supposedly committed a sexual act, the manner in which the questions are posed simultaneously reminds the reader not only who Mary is and what she has experienced, but also of Mary's purity because the author has already established for his readers that her answer to all these questions is that she is sexually pure and innocent. Not surprisingly, then, when Mary speaks out for the fourth time in the narrative it is to proclaim outright her innocence and purity: "As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know a man" (*Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός καθότι καθαρά εἰμι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω*; *Prot. Jas.* 15:13).

Significantly, her statement includes the second use of the term *καθαρός* in the narrative as evidence of the language of purity, again

Mary so that she is afforded the opportunity to declare and publicly prove her innocence and maintained purity and virginity.

This latter possibility is reinforced by the fact that after telling Joseph he must return the virgin, the high priest decides to submit them to "the Lord's drink test"⁹⁰ with the purpose of disclosing *their* sins: "I will give you to drink the water of the Lord's testing, and it will make your sins manifest in your eyes" (Ποτιῶ μάς τὸ ὄδωρ τῆς ἐλέγχεως κυρίου, καὶ φανερώσει τὸ ἀμάρτημα ὑμῶν ἐν ὄφθαλμοῖς ὑμῶν; *Prot. Jas.* 16:3).⁹¹ If the point of the drink test is to disclose Mary's and Joseph's guilt to the high priest and to the public, why does the high priest say that *their* sin will be disclosed to Mary and Joseph? Mary and Joseph know already of their innocence, as does the reader, so this insistence upon the drink test operates narratively for the sole purpose of reinforcing their innocence by means of a public test.⁹²

Again, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Levitical and mishnaic understandings of virginity are almost always interpreted in the context of marriage. That is to say, virginity is praised as a virtue for young girls and becomes only an issue of shame if lost outside of marriage. Understood in the context of marriage, Mary's testing scene is very much out of the norm and reinforces the idea that the tests were constructed by the author for the purpose of allowing Mary to declare her sexual purity in her own voice. What is also noteworthy about this test is the explicit involvement of "carnal impurity." In the first test, the concern for Mary's

⁹⁰ The *Protevangelium of James*' reference to the Lord's drink test immediately brings to mind the bitter water test cited in Numbers 5:11–31, whereby a drink test is administered to a woman to determine whether she has been unfaithful to her husband. When Mary's and Joseph's plea of innocence does not convince the high priest, they are instead accused of perjury and forced to undergo a test to verify their culpability. This test involves a drink, which must be consumed by the accused, followed by banishment into the wilderness. If unharmed upon their return, their innocence will be proven. As expected, Joseph and Mary return unharmed, which satisfies the high priest and the people of Israel. As a result, they are publicly vindicated and are sent home together. This scene has caused much discussion in terms of its evidence against knowledge of Jewish customs and therefore of the narrative's Jewish origins. See Chapter One for further discussion.

⁹¹ Cf. Tischendorf's text which has "sin in them."

⁹² Given that earlier in the narrative Mary's purity is affirmed by everyone (priests, people of Israel, etc.), the reaction of surprise by all seems to indicate the author's need to address a number of concerns. First, the surprised reaction of the people heightens the dramatic effect of Mary's self-proclaimed purity and innocence. Second, the author also addresses the obvious paradox of Mary's virginal yet physically pregnant body, which probably weighed heavily on the minds of the people in the narrative as well as the readers. Perhaps for this reason the author confirms Mary's innocence several times, i.e., by having her and Joseph publicly announce it, by depicting them passing any test conducted on them, and by repeating over and over that Mary is blessed and chosen by God.

sexual and moral purity is only hinted at in Mary's response that she is both a virgin and innocent. Here, Mary's test surrounding her continued virginity is discussed explicitly in terms of sin, thus directly linking Mary's sexual impurity with an impurity that defiles morally. In this way, Mary's affirmation that she is pure can also be interpreted as her declaration that she is "carnally pure."

Finally, in terms of literary structure, up to this point in the narrative Mary has defended her status twice. Joseph's private questioning of her condition, which is quickly dismissed when the angel is able to confirm Mary's pregnancy as being holy, sets up the reader for a second test before the high priest with the expectation that she will again pass and proclaim her innocence. When the test before the high priest is conducted, the seriousness of the situation heightens because the interrogation now becomes public and Mary and Joseph must prove physically that they have not sinned. After successfully passing the drink test, readers anticipate a third and final test that Mary must face to prove her innocence and maintained purity.

By carefully designing a narrative that supports Mary's characterization as pure and holy (via plot, setting, action, speech, and character traits, etc.), the author provides the reader with the necessary textual clues to assess and construct trustworthy impressions of Mary's character. In other words, the author has constructed a series of scenes whereby the desired reader-response⁹³ is to expect the best of Mary during each test, despite the harsh accusations by religious leaders that she has violated her sexual purity. With each passing test, Mary's "character indicators"⁹⁴ continue to support the evidence for her representation as exceptionally pure. These textual clues to accurately determine Mary's true character and thus purity become increasingly important as the virginity tests she is forced to endure become significantly more difficult and serious. From a literary perspective,

⁹³ In the reading process, Wolfgang Iser explains that "gaps" are perceived by the reader when holes or blanks are developed that need "filling in." The result of such "filling in" is connected patterns of reading to develop a narrative whole. In Mary's case, when the reader "fills in the gap" concerning whether Mary will be deemed pure or not, he or she does so by connecting Mary's past actions to the narrative patterns set out thus far. On this and the literary theory of "reader-response" or what Iser refers to as the "implied reader," see Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction and from Bunyan and Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 237, *idem*, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), and Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 236.

⁹⁴ See Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 4–6 on character indicators. See also Iser, *Implied Reader*, 237; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186–90 for the process of reading and the purpose of gaps, blanks and ambiguities.

tive, the goal of the author is clear: continue to strengthen the impression of Mary as pure by providing more and more textual clues to her character in order to ensure that there is no doubt in the reader's mind of her absolute innocence and purity, no matter what impossible test may lie ahead with the goal to prove otherwise.

III. Test Three: Salome Questions Mary's Pregnancy

Initiated immediately after she completes her second test successfully, Mary's third and final test begins when the emperor Augustus orders a census for all those living in Bethlehem of Judea (*Prot. Jas.* 17:1).⁹⁵ The narrative commences with the journey to Bethlehem, undertaken not only by Joseph and Mary, but also by all of Joseph's other sons (*Prot. Jas.* 17:5).⁹⁶ In anticipation of enrolling his family, Joseph ponders how he should identify Mary, rejecting both the ideas of wife and daughter as suitable options, thus reinforcing their unique marriage (*Prot. Jas.* 17:2–4). Though Joseph cannot decide, the text establishes that Mary has clearly not played the role of his wife despite the angelic message to take on precisely this role (*Prot. Jas.* 8:8). Joseph places Mary on the saddled donkey led by his unidentified son and followed by another of Joseph's sons named Samuel (*Prot. Jas.* 17:5). Halfway through the trip (at the three mile marker), Joseph questions Mary's unusual mood since she is described as both

⁹⁵ This section of the narrative may be familiar to the reader because it recalls and elaborates the infancy stories offered by the gospels of Matthew and Luke since it includes events such as the journey to Bethlehem for the census, the birth of Jesus and the astrologers' visit, and finally Herod's slaughter of the children, but of course with its own twists.

⁹⁶ The reference to "Joseph's sons" is explained in *Prot. Jas.* 9:8 as belonging to him from a previous marriage: "I already have sons and I'm an old man..." The *Protevangelium of James'* explanation for Joseph's other sons seems to support the Epiphanian solution to the problem of Jesus' siblings, i.e., both Mark (6:3) and Matthew (13:55–56) speak without explanation about the brothers and sisters of Jesus. See John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 316–32 and Richard Bauckham's response to Meier's conclusion that champions a Helvidian view over an Epiphanian in his article, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphanian Response to John P. Meier," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 686–700. For a specific discussion on James, the brother of Jesus, and his historical connection to the figure of Jesus, see Wilhelm Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustraditionen* (FRLANT 139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); Pierre-Antoine Bernheim, *James, Brother of Jesus* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1997); Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (NTR; New York: Routledge, 1999), and John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

laughing, but also gloomy.⁹⁷ Most significantly, Mary responds directly to Joseph's question in her own voice: "Joseph, because I see two peoples with my eyes, one weeping and mourning and one rejoicing and glad" ('Ιωσήφ, ὅτι δύο λαοὺς βλέπω ἐν τοῖς ὄφθαλμοῖς μου, ἑνα κλαίοντα καὶ κοπτόμενον καὶ ἑνα χαίροντα καὶ ἀγαλλιῶντα; *Prot. Jas.* 17:9).

As mentioned earlier, Mary speaks in her own voice only five times throughout the entire narrative.⁹⁸ In her response to Joseph concerning her unusual mood, Mary speaks prophetically for the fifth and final time about the significant role her unborn child will play in the world and therefore her own role as the mother of the Lord (*Prot. Jas.* 17:9). Without a doubt, Mary is well-prepared for any test to prove her identity as the Virgin of the Lord and her state of purity. At this halfway point in the text Mary informs Joseph that her condition has progressed and the child is ready to arrive (*Prot. Jas.* 17:10). Joseph helps her down from her donkey and finds a nearby cave where she can deliver the child in privacy.⁹⁹ After instructing

⁹⁷ Various interpretations of Mary's statement have been put forth. The two most popular include: [1] Jesus' ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins; and [2] the rise of believers (i.e., "Christianity") and fall of unbelievers (i.e., "Judaism"); P. van Stempvoort, "The *Protevangelium Jacobi*: The Sources of its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on its Date," in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F.L. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 421–22.

⁹⁸ As a reminder, the first and second time Mary speaks, she questions the manner in which she will have her child and accepts her role as the servant of the Lord (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6, 11:9). The third and fourth time she speaks is to declare without hesitation or reservation that she is innocent and has maintained her state of purity (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8, 15:13).

⁹⁹ The reference to the cave is another detail that is unique to the *Protevangelium of James* and thus departs from Luke 2:7, which depicts the birth in a manger or inn, and Matt 2:11, which describes Mary in her home. Both Justin Martyr and Origen of Alexandria attest to a cave as the place of Jesus' birth (*Dial.* 78.5: "And Joseph, the spouse of Mary, who wished at first to put away his betrothed Mary, supposing her to be pregnant by intercourse with a man, i.e., from fornication, was commanded in a vision not to put away his wife; and the angel who appeared to him told him that what is in her womb is of the Holy Ghost...But when the Child was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find a lodging in that village, he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger, and here the Magi who came from Arabia found Him"; *Cels.* 1.51: "In regards to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, if anyone, after studying Micah's prophecy and the history recorded in the sacred writings by the disciples of Jesus. If needing to have additional sources of evidence, Let him be aware that the Scriptures are confirmed and the Gospel involving his birth, for there can be seen the cave located in Bethlehem where He was born and the manger where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. And this site is talked about with great interest in all the surrounding countries. Even among the enemies of our faith it is being said that in this cave Jesus was born, the One who is worshiped and revered by the Christians"). On the imagery of the cave or "from a rock," being in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, see Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 125–26.

his sons to stand outside the cave, Joseph leaves in search of a midwife to assist in the birth (*Prot. Jas.* 17:11–18:2).

While Joseph is away, an extraordinary event occurs that affects not only the content of the narrative but also the style in which it is written: addressed in the first person, Joseph has a vision in which he sees everything suspended in time, signifying the exact moment Jesus is brought into the world (*Prot. Jas.* 18:3–11).¹⁰⁰ After a detailed description of this experience, the suspended time breaks, thus allowing Joseph to continue his search for a midwife. After finding one, the nameless midwife questions the circumstances of their situation by asking Joseph if the one having the baby in the cave is his wife (*Prot. Jas.* 19:1–11). Strategically, the author situates this conversation just before Mary undergoes her final test to remind his readers, just one more time, that Mary is indeed filling her role as the virgin and mother of the Lord.

When questioned about Mary's identity, Joseph provides an awkward explanation, which is worth quoting in full:

19:6 And I said, "My betrothed." ⁷And she said to me, "Is she not your wife?" ⁸And I said to her, "She is Mary who was brought up in the Temple of the Lord, and I received her by lot as my wife, ⁹but she is not [really] my wife, and she has conceived by the Holy Spirit."

19:6 Καὶ εἶπον ἐγώ· Ἡ μεμνηστευμένη μοι. ⁷Καὶ εἶπε μοι· Οὐκ ἔστι σου γυνή; ⁸Καὶ εἶπον αὐτῇ· Μαρία ἔστιν, η ἀνατραφείσα ἐν ναῷ κυρίου. καὶ ἐκληρωσάμην αὐτὴν γυναῖκα, ⁹καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν μου γυνή, ἀλλὰ σύλλημα ἔχει ἐκ πνεύματος ἀγίου.¹⁰¹

The nature of their relationship reaches its apex in Joseph's most awkward and cumbersome explanation of Mary's identity to the Hebrew midwife. Here Joseph describes Mary as his "betrothed" (the word used here is from μνηστεύω), but immediately complicates that statement by explaining that he received Mary as his wife but that she is actually not his wife. Though Joseph's explanation is anything but clear, his intentions ironically are: in title, Mary may be Joseph's wife, but she does not play the role of a wife in terms of being obligated to engage in sexual relations. Most interesting about the reference to Mary as Joseph's betrothed is the interpretation suggested of an inchoate marriage since, though "betrothed," they are understood as married. As Satlow suggests, the idea of a betrothal as a legal act

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed discussion on the form and function of Joseph's suspension of time scene, see Bovon's, "The Suspension of Time in Chapter 18 of *Protevangelium Jacobi*," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester* (ed. B. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 393–405.

¹⁰¹ Note that the conversation between Joseph and the midwife is significantly shorter in the Bodmer Papyrus. In accordance with Hock, I also follow Tischendorf's text here instead of de Strycker's.

is an established principle unique to biblical and rabbinic law since we have little evidence that Jews practiced inchoate marriage outside Palestine¹⁰² or within the more cosmopolitan areas within Palestine.¹⁰³ As presented in the narrative, the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas on marriage reflect most closely those offered in biblical and rabbinical literature (esp. *m. Qiddushin*).

Though somewhat doubtful of the circumstances, the midwife seems convinced that Mary's and Joseph's relationship is an inchoate marriage, so follows Joseph to the cave. Upon arrival at the cave, which had been overshadowed by a dark cloud, they find that they are too late as Mary has already given birth (*Prot. Jas.* 19:13). In an instant, the narrator describes how the dark cloud withdraws from the cave and an intense light appears inside, which after a short time recedes to make visible a child, feeding from the breast of his mother (*Prot. Jas.* 19:15–16). Mary's feeding of Jesus recalls Anna's feeding of Mary earlier in the narrative, but, of course, with one important difference: in accordance with Lev 12:2–6 that interprets a new mother as being contagious and ritually impure in the same way a menstruant is impure,¹⁰⁴ Anna waits the prescribed days and then cleanses herself of the flow of blood before she nurses her child. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Levitical law does not proscribe feeding one's child during a new mother's post-partum period. Anna's decision not to do

¹⁰² Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 69–73.

¹⁰³ Satlow contends that the only concrete evidence for the practice of inchoate marriages among Jews comes from Matt 1:18, where Mary is said to be "betrothed" to Joseph, though he does admit that first century Jews in rural Galilee may have practiced this biblical form of betrothal; *Jewish Marriage*, 73. Cf. Tal Ilan's study on a marriage contract from the Babatha archives discovered in the Judean desert, which attests to the practice of premarital cohabitation in ancient Judea; "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea: The Evidence of the Babatha Archive and the Mishnah (Ketuboth 1.4)," *HTR* 86.3 (1993): 247–64.

¹⁰⁴ A parturient is deemed impure like a menstruant for seven days if she gives birth to a boy and fourteen days if she gives birth to a girl, after which she remains a threat only to the saneta for 33 days for a boy or 66 days for a girl. According to *m. Nid* 3.1, a woman who is deemed unclean as a result of post-partum impurities, even those women who suffer miscarriages or abortions, are only deemed unclean for the prescribed number of days (7 and 33 for males; 14 and 66 for females) if there is blood; otherwise, she may be deemed clean. In addition to the prescribed days for post-partum purification, a tradition attributed to R. Meir states that if a woman was in hard travail, she may be deemed clean even forty or fifty days, to which is added a tradition attributed to R. Judah that "it is enough for her that the blood be deemed clean that issues during her ninth month." R. Jose and R. Simeon are depicted as both agreeing that her blood remains clean only up to two weeks after she has been deemed unclean for the prescribed days (*m. Nid* 4.4–6). In any case, although these Tannaim expand Levitical discussions on the impurities of parturients and even deem some post-partum blood as clean in specific cases, they say nothing about banning women from feeding their children during this time of purification.

so, however, can be interpreted as her belief that the impurity of a parturient can be conveyed to a newborn. The idea that a parturient's impurity is transferable to her child is an interpretation suggested precisely by the Damascus Document (4Q266 6 ii 11).¹⁰⁵ Whereas Levitical and rabbinical legislation suggest two levels of impurity for a parturient (e.g., the first 7/14 days are more severe than the second 33/66 days)¹⁰⁶ and say nothing about prohibiting breastfeeding until a state of ritual purity can be attained, the Damascus Document implies only one severe time of impurity of 40/80 days and also considers both newborn child and mother as impure during this period since a "wet nurse" is mentioned for the child.¹⁰⁷ The Damascus Document (4Q266 6 ii 11) explicitly forbids the mother from nursing during the period of her impurity in fear that she will pass on her impurity to the child.¹⁰⁸ A noticeable difference between the Damascus Document and

¹⁰⁵ See Lev 12:2–6. Cf. the Damascus document (4Q266 6 ii 11), which states that a new mother is ritually contagious for the whole 40/80 days. See Hannah Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 99, 136–37 and Ian Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 55–58.

¹⁰⁶ According to the rabbis, the two stages for the new mother are different in that during the first stage, the mother is restricted from making contact with a number of different items as in the time of her menstruation. These restrictions include contact with food, people, cooking utensils, etc., since the result will be the contamination of such items. In the second stage, the mother is only restricted from entering sacred spaces and making contact with holy items; contact with people and things in the common sphere are no longer susceptible to contracting impurities from her; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 99.

¹⁰⁷ Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 56–57. Werrett describes the Damascus Document's reference to wet-nurses as an example of gap-filling for the silence of the biblical material regarding the ability of a newborn to be contaminated by its mother.

¹⁰⁸ Harrington argues that the belief in the human condition as being inherently unclean even at birth as found in the Damascus Document 4Q266, 4QMiscellaneous Rules 4Q265 and other Qumran texts may suggest a Qumranic theological principle: that along with birth comes impurities; *Purity Texts*, 62. Baumgarten suggests that this same rule concerning the impurity associated with birth applied even to Eve and Adam. In his examination of 4QMiscellaneous Rules 4Q265, Baumgarten determines that Adam and Eve did not enter into the Garden of Eden immediately because they too were waiting the proper days (40 and 80 days respectively) before entering the Holy Garden. Using the book of Jubilees to restore the gaps in lines 11–13, Baumgarten argues that Adam and Eve did not participate in any holy activities until the prescribed days were complete because as a prototype of the sacred Temple, the Garden of Eden is understood as Holy and therefore subject to the same purity laws regarding the maintenance of its holiness (cf. Jub 3:12; 1QH^a 16.10–13); "Purification after Childbirth and the Sacred Garden in 4Q265 and Jubilees," in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris, 1992* (ed. G.J. Brooke; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 3–10. Harrington has argued that since neither Eve nor her newborn child enter the Holy Garden before waiting the proper days, 4Q265 seems to indicate that both were considered unclean; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 62. For a contrary position to

our narrative, of course, is that no wet-nurse is ever mentioned in the *Protevangelium of James*.

Mary, on the other hand, immediately provides her breast to Jesus, emphasizing a purity that is so exceptional it no longer requires the ritual practice of post-partum purification; as Jennifer A. Glancy notes, "Mary is spared the polluting stains caused by childbirth discharges because the birth of Jesus does not pollute her."¹⁰⁹ The narrator's depiction of Mary's ability to bypass the required purification rituals whilst still maintaining the purity of her child emphatically underscores Mary's exceptional purity, but also her status as the Lord's Virgin. As discussed earlier, all previous references to enclosed places of purity are utterly exploded in this scene when a simple cave in the wilderness, potentially offering the most danger, is transformed by Mary's mere presence into the safest of spaces solely through her much-affirmed purity, so safe that the Lord's son can be born here and fed immediately with the Virgin's milk without the performance of the proper rituals for purification (*Prot. Jas.* 19:16 cf. 5:9). In this way, Mary's new status allows her purity to follow her wherever she goes; Mary is not only pure, but holy.

The midwife's immediate and complete recognition of the situation as a miracle, which she interprets as "salvation born to Israel" (σωτηρία τῷ λόραντι γεγένηται; *Prot. Jas.* 19:14), reinforces Mary's special status and also allows the midwife to acknowledge her privileged status as a witness to such an event. The narrator reports that after leaving the cave, the midwife relays these events to a woman named Salome, who acts as a foil character to the midwife who has just indicated her immediate belief that the baby was born of a virgin (*Prot. Jas.* 19:18). After Salome indicates her refusal to believe a virgin could give birth to a child (παρθένος ἐγέννησεν; *Prot. Jas.* 19:19), both women return to the cave with the intention of testing Mary for the third and final time.¹¹⁰

Upon entering the cave, Salome demands that Mary position herself so that she can perform a gynaecological examination (literally, "unless I put my finger and examine her genitals"¹¹¹; ἐὰν μὴ βαλῶ τὸν δάκτυλόν

Baumgarten's and Harrington's interpretation, see Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 56–58.

¹⁰⁹ Jennifer A. Glancy's *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 114.

¹¹⁰ The details concerning the cave scene are unique to our narrative and do not have parallels in other infancy narratives, e.g., Matthew and Luke. Note that instead of reading of shepherds and magi learning of the birth of Christ, the *Protevangelium of James* introduces two humble female characters who first receive the news.

¹¹¹ As Foskett notes, *physis* (φύσις) is often translated in the general sense as "nature" but is more accurately referred to as "genitalia," most often female genitalia like vulva or vagina. John Winkler observes that while "genitalia," "vulva," and "vagina," may be

μου καὶ ἔρευνήσω τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς: *Prot. Jas.* 19:19). Unlike the two previous tests Mary is forced to endure, the intrusive test performed by Salome is the most intense and serious because the author has constructed a situation whereby Mary must prove that she is physically a virgin and has maintained an absolute state of purity despite the fact that she has just given birth. The results of this last test, however, are not unexpected. Without hesitation, God punishes Salome for her disbelief and unfaithfulness by causing her hand to be consumed by flames¹¹² the moment she inserts her finger into Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 20:2–4).¹¹³ After realizing that this punishment is a direct result of her transgression, Salome calls out to the God of her ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for forgiveness (*Prot. Jas.* 20:5). As soon as the words of her prayer leave her lips, the narrator describes how a messenger of the Lord descends from on high to tell Salome to pick up the child if she wants to receive salvation and joy. After picking up the child, Salome's hands are immediately healed and her position towards the child is changed; Salome recognizes Mary not only as a virgin mother, but also Jesus as child born to be king of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 20:11).

Ronald F. Hock as well as a number of other commentators note that the reference to Salome inserting her finger into Mary recalls “doubting Thomas” in John 20:25, when Thomas insists that he will not believe that

common terms among physicians, pharmacists, and farmers, etc., to refer to *physis* (φύσις), that these terms are not commonly used in literary styles outside of such professions; *The Constraints of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 217–20. See Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 159, 186 n. 82 and Glancy's discussion on Salome attempting to perform a gynaecological exam on Mary; *Corporal Knowledge*, 116.

¹¹² Since Mary literally carries within her the most pure of spaces, unviolated, even after giving birth, Salome's actions certainly represent the most intrusive violation of that space. That her hand burns is an interesting metaphor for the fires of hell as punishment for sin, but also for the “light” or heat of God's protection of Mary becoming extremely literal. Mary's proclamation “As the Lord God lives, I am pure,” are not just words here – they become Salome's reality. In addition, Harrington argues that in Jewish tradition, holiness is composed of two major facets: “Consuming Fire,” and “Ethical Goodness.” She describes “Consuming Fire” as holiness that is a “separate ultimate power which reacts violently when coming into contact with any impurity or imperfection.” See, Harrington, *Purity Texts, 9 and Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (RFCC 7; London: Routledge, 2001), 12–13. It is symbolic that Salome's hand is literally consumed with fire at the touch of Mary; in other words, Mary's holy body reacts violently to the impurity of Salome's hand.

¹¹³ Salome's prayer to God for forgiveness is also interesting and may also serve to underscore Mary's purity. After calling upon the God of her ancestors, Salome prays that God will remember her and request that she not be made an example of because she has been “healing people in your name and have been receiving my payment from you” (*Prot. Jas.* 20:7). Salome's qualifications as a legitimate Hebrew midwife leave no room for doubt that the test Mary endures leaves her purity unaffected and untainted.

the One who has appeared before the twelve is truly Jesus until “I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side.”¹¹⁴ Glancy observes, however, that despite the fact that Salome and Thomas may doubt but are eventually persuaded to believe, the testing that takes place is different in meaningful ways. She explains:

If Thomas accepts the invitation, as I imagine he does, his curious finger probes an open and gaping hole. Salome's finger probes an orifice that is, if not sealed, then defensively clenched. The Johannine scene affirms the tactile quality of resurrected flesh, affirms, that is, that resurrected flesh can be touched. The scene in the *Protevangelium* repudiates touching. Mary's body not only retains its virginity. Her virginity, her body, is untouched.¹¹⁵

What Glancy rightly observes in her reading of Mary's closed body and Salome's flamed finger is that Mary's physical condition is inseparable from her character as pure. Indeed touching is not simply repudiated but reacts violently reminding the reader that Jesus' prenatal sanctuary is holy space and incompatible with impurity.

From a literary perspective, the author's structuring of three tests to determine Mary's virginity reinforces her character as pure at a number of levels. First, the repetition of the tests and Mary's success at passing one after another strengthen the idea that Mary is indeed both sexually (and morally) pure.¹¹⁶ Success at one or two tests may pass as coincidence, but three seems to indicate confirmation both for the other characters in the narrative, but most importantly for the reader. Second, the repetition of the tests, but with variance, allows the author to depict the acceptance of

¹¹⁴ Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 69 n. 19:19.

¹¹⁵ Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 117.

¹¹⁶ Sternberg argues that “patterns of similarity,” or “structures of repetition,” are all based on the principle of analogy, whereby analogy is “essentially a spatial pattern, composed of at least two elements (two characters, events, strands of action, etc.) between which there is at least one point of similarity and one of dissimilarity: the similarity affords the basis for the spatial linkage and confrontation of the analogical elements, whereas the dissimilarity makes for their mutual illumination, qualification, or simply concretization.” Sternberg goes on to state that these instances of repetition can take several different forms including [1] on the level of Sound and Linguistics; [2] on the level of Plot; [3] on a Thematic level; and finally [4] on a Generic level. The structure of repetition displayed in our narrative by means of the three purity tests manifests itself on several levels. Mary's verbatim response that she is indeed pure to the charge made against her by Joseph, the high priests, and Salome uses repetition on a sound and linguistic sense. On the level of plot and theme, the equivalences and contrasts between events, characters, and situations is also expressed in our narrative by means of Mary's purity testing ordeals, by the different characters who conduct the tests, and the testing scenes themselves. See Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365–68.

Mary's purity as exceptional to a variety of audiences.¹¹⁷ The first test satisfies the concerns of Joseph, her human protector; the second, the priestly leaders and her community; and the third, all the people of Israel as represented by the characters of the midwife and Salome. Third, although the goal of each test is the same, i.e., to determine Mary's sexual status, the tests also provide the reader with crucial information about Mary's character and actively progress the storyline. For instance, Mary proves that she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit; that she has not had any sexual relations with Joseph; and finally that she is the embodiment of purity since she is physically a virgin with child and the Virgin of the Lord. Finally, the author's employment of the three tests also serves to coach readers to the appropriate response to the details laid before them – namely to confirm Mary's sexual status as a virgin and thus her extreme purity. In this way, the tests significantly increase in severity and make all the difference in eliciting the proper reader-response. In other words, the reader is given numerous textual hints about Mary's character up until the "first test," and so the task of confirming Joseph's belief that Mary's conception was of the Holy Spirit comes not as a surprise, but as an expectation. Mary's successful passing of the second test is dependent upon her ability to pass the first, just as the success of her final test is dependent on the outcome of the second. If Mary's physical test administered by Salome was presented as the "first test," the author would risk having too large of a "gap" for his readers to fill. The author's structured increase in difficulty from test to test ensures the proper characterization for his protagonist.

G. Conclusion

In this chapter, we turned to the much discussed portrayal of Mary's sexual status as a *parthenos* expressed in the chapters following her identification as the "Virgin of the Lord." When focusing on Mary's virginity, we find that once she is given the title "Virgin of the Lord," Mary's purity no longer is characterized exclusively by her associations with the Temple and its priests and described in terms likened to a Temple sacrifice. Instead, Mary transitions into being a symbolic Temple replacement herself. Indeed, under the protection of the Lord, Mary's purity ensures that she can even give birth in a cave because divinity now accompanies her everywhere she goes. In this way and in accordance with Foskett who argues that Mary's

¹¹⁷ On the importance of variances and differences in the use of repetition, see Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 366.

characterization as pure must be understood in the context of holiness,¹¹⁸ Mary's exceptional purity sets her aside for God and her body, which is not only pure, but holy, transforms into a sacred Temple suitable for the Son of God.¹¹⁹

Additionally, this specific treatment of Mary's virginity also serves to explore and confirm her ever-virgin status at the conception, pregnancy, and birth of her child as well as her role as Virgin Mother. In particular, I suggest that three tests are used to confirm her status as the Lord's virgin and her dualistic role as Virgin Mother in several ways throughout the narrative: [1] to allow Mary to speak in her own voice about the nature of her status; [2] to reinforce the peculiarity of Mary's and Joseph's marriage, but also establish that marriage is a legitimate way to express devotion to God; and [3] to express a connection between virginity and holiness, and thus to present Mary as both pure and holy.

While Mary speaks so seldomly in the narrative, her voice is heard at extremely critical points making her words strikingly emphatic. Of the five times Mary speaks, three times are specifically related to her status as a virgin (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6, 13:8–11, 15:13). Likewise, even though *καθαρός* is the most common term for "purity," its use only three times throughout the entire narrative reinforces its importance. That the word *καθαρός* is placed in Mary's mouth two out of the three times it is used and two out of the five times Mary speaks, highlights precisely its significance: Mary is indeed a virgin despite taking on the role of mother.

To further establish Mary's ever-virginity, we find that biblical and rabbinical ideas on betrothals and marriages reinforce the extremely ambiguous relationship between Mary and Joseph. The narrative's reference to Mary functioning as a "wife" at *Prot. Jas.* 8:8, her transfer from the Temple priests to the house of Joseph at *Prot. Jas.* 9:11–12, and Joseph's need to "divorce" her quietly alongside his difficulty in identifying her relationship to him at *Prot. Jas.* 17:2–3 and 19:6–9 and the manner in which Joseph receives Mary at *Prot. Jas.* 9:7, reflect the author's intention of blurring the idea of a traditional Jewish marriage between them. While the text expresses marriage as a positive form of religious expression since Mary is to be understood as Joseph's wife, she is also not to be associated with the obligations (i.e., sexual relations) expected in all other Jewish marriages since, as her title of the Virgin of the Lord makes clear, in actuality she belongs exclusively to the Lord.

¹¹⁸ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148.

¹¹⁹ As the sacred Temple is often described as God's holy residence on earth, the image of Mary's body as a holy Temple is most fitting since it is in the womb of her body that the Son of God will dwell.

The focus on Mary's sexual purity as expressed in our examination of her new designation and endurance of three virginity tests also strengthens the connection between virginity and holiness and the value and prestige of the virginal or celibate life. Though Mary's virginity in the narrative indeed reflects the kind of elevation associated with this practice as expressed in many early Christian ideas surrounding virginity and celibacy, the *Protevangelium of James* also does not place it as a superior road to follow over marriage and childbirth since Mary is described as participating honourably in both. On the other hand, its importance for attaining holiness should not be underestimated either as evident in the crisis and panic it brings when Mary's virginity is questioned. Assuredly Mary's virginal state alongside her exceptional ritual purity set her aside for the Lord and make her holy. Interesting for our studies is the close juxtaposition between the "angelic" life of virginity and the "profane" world of marriage and the positive portrayal of both ways of life as legitimate forms of devotion in the *Protevangelium of James* since it recalls quite significantly Syrian Christian ideas on virginity, celibacy, and married life.

Additionally, what our examination of Mary's sexual purity also allowed us to do is test Hayes' categories of impurity. Mary's three tests in particular reflect an interest not only in Mary's virginity, but also her innocence. In other words, the accusations put forth by Joseph, Annas, and then by the Hebrew midwife against Mary involve a concern for her guilt in addition to the loss of her virginity and purity. While the accusation of guilt is not made explicit, the options are either that Mary herself was seduced and gave in to temptation as the analogy to Adam and Eve evokes, or that by exposing herself beyond the walls of Joseph's home, her virginity was taken from her by force. Either way, the issue at hand involves both Mary's ritual impurity and sexual immorality, or what Hayes has coined as "carnal impurity." With regard to genealogical impurity and in contrast to Hayes, we note that Mary's Davidic lineage still remains important to her presentation as pure and the reason for her chosen role as the mother of God despite the prominent interest in carnal impurity.

In the chapter that follows, we change course and examine not a category of impurity being represented in the *Protevangelium of James*, but rather focus on the clues provided by our examination of the purity issues discussed thus far in order to help shed light on the question of provenance for our text. To anticipate, I suggest that the ideas concerning purity in the *Protevangelium of James*, especially its interest in ritual and menstrual impurity as well as ideas on Mary's dualistic role as Virgin Mother and the text's connection to Judaism, are concerns consistent with the kind of religious activity occurring in and around Syria.

Chapter Five

Provenance Revisited

A. Jews and Christians in Syria

Having now considered the theme of purity with the *Protevangelium of James* in some detail, we can return to questions about the text's date, provenance, and relationship to Judaism. Disagreements among earlier studies, particularly on the question of provenance, result in several proposed locations such as Syria,¹ interior Asia Minor,² and Egypt.³ The reference to the laurel tree Anna sits beneath to lament her life's woes, for instance, has convinced some of a Syrian Antioch locale since Antioch in particular was known for its laurel trees (*Prot. Jas.* 2:7).⁴ Likewise, the positing of Egypt as the most likely location has also been offered because of its geographical landscape of mountains and wilderness, similar features cited in the narrative.⁵ Ronald F. Hock contends that perhaps the only answers possible for the question of provenance must be negative ones. In accordance with Johannes Quasten, W. Michaelis, Émile de Strycker, E. Cothenet, Oscar Cullmann, and J.K. Elliott, Hock acknowledges the widely held negative answer of "not-Palestine" based on the author's supposed

¹ E.g., H.R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 22; L. Conrady, "Das *Protevangelium Jacobi* in neuer Beleuchtung," TSK 62 (1889): 728–83; Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 108–9; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 49; George Zervos, "Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth: Have we Found the Missing Link?," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 107–20; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt; 2d ed.; London: Routledge, 1993), 291, etc.

² Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 11. Hock also proposes Egypt and Syria as possible contenders.

³ E.g., Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 419–21 and É. Cothenet, "Le *Protevangelie de Jacques*: Origine, Genre et Signification d'un Premier Midrash Chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1998): 4267.

⁴ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 22.

⁵ De Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 419–21.

ignorance of "Palestinian geography."⁶ To this Cullmann adds, "and Jewish customs,"⁷ but also recognizes the problem of such a conclusion, since he admits the validity of the recent challenges made to this assessment by Malcolm Lowe.⁸

In Chapter One, I proposed that such arguments remain unconvincing, since they are largely based on isolated geographical details with little consideration of textual evidence for the concerns of the work as a whole. I thus suggested that perhaps a more fruitful way to shed light on the text's provenance and thus "test" what scholars have previously proposed may be to focus on the concerns and interests of the text itself in order to see if they hint towards a likely locale or milieu. In this way, a determination of provenance based on the text's governing concerns may confirm what others have suggested as a locale based on geographical details.

The goal of this chapter will be to review the main concerns of the text in order to suggest a possible provenance or milieu. In this study, we have examined the *Protevangelium of James*' interest in ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity, its connection to Judaism especially as it pertains to the promotion of the Jewish Temple and the continuation of ritual practices, and its interest in the promotion of both ascetic and family life. What I suggest is that these interests are most compatible with a Syrian provenance.⁹ Indeed, I argue the following: [1] the concern for all three types of purity described in the text is more marked in Syrian traditions than elsewhere; [2] the continued Jewish practices and attention to Jewish purity laws in the text may reflect the heavy Jewish influence in Syrian Christianity; and [3] the tension between ascetic versus family life displayed by Mary's dualistic role as Virgin Mother and the emphasis placed on her physical and real body as a virgin may echo and respond to precisely the same concerns found in Syria, where arguments over celibacy versus a married life and anti-docetic conversations dominated much of the literature, especially in the second and third centuries.

In order to propose a Syrian Christian context for the *Protevangelium of James*, I proceed in two stages and use evidence solely from Antioch and Edessa with the hope that between the two,¹⁰ we may achieve a broader

sense of trends in the region. In order to explore what Christianity looked like in Syria from its beginnings to the early third century, this first stage involves focusing on questions about Syrian Christianity's relationship to Judaism whereby Antioch serves as a test case. We will ask: what is the relationship between Judaism and "Jewish-Christianity"¹¹ in Antioch, and what precisely was perceived as "Jewish" in Syrian Christianity? In the second stage of our inquiry into a likely locale or milieu for our text, we explore sources from Syria in order to draw comparisons and demonstrate shared interests between our text and Syrian Christian literature. This investigation involves a general discussion of the role of women in Syria, but also more specifically focuses special attention on the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, since it shares with the *Protevangelium of James* a sharp concern for menstrual and ritual purity and for the importance of family life. Additionally, I examine other elements characteristic of Syrian Christianity found especially in Edessa, such as the major issues and conflicts that arose in the early church with special attention paid to the roles of so-called "heretical" figures, ideologies, and traditions.

B. Jews, "Jewish-Christians," and Christians in Syria

In this section focused on Syrian Christianity in Antioch, I examine the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the influence of Judaism on Syrian Christianity. The Jewish influence I discuss below can take on a number of forms and may include, but is not limited to, the continued importance of Torah observance, interactions and connections with contemporary Jewish communities, and even self-identification as Jewish. For

and the starting point of military and commercial activity to the east. Along with Rome, Antioch was considered the most important city for the development of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Edessa's significance for Christianity, on the other hand, can be found in its contribution to language and education. Syriac, the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, was the official language of Syriac-speaking Christianity and served as the language used for writing down Christian works. Second, there are a good number of sources from the first to the third centuries that can be linked to either Antioch or Edessa. Third, Hans W.J. Drijvers writes that Antioch and Edessa can be considered the "two poles of Syrian Christianity as it developed during the first centuries AD in the Roman province of Syria." If this is true, then examining both Antioch and Edessa will provide us with a broad picture of Syria and its culture, history and traditions; Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; New York: Routledge, 1992), 124–29.

⁶ See Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12 and references therein.

⁷ Oscar Cullmann, "The *Protevangelium of James*," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 424.

⁸ See Malcolm Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha: A Fresh Approach to the Gospels of James, Pseudo-Thomas, Peter and Nicodemus," *NovT* 23.1 (1981): 59–62, esp. 62 n. 24 and the discussion on his challenges in Chapter One.

⁹ On my use of "Syria" and "Syrian," see Introduction, n. 13.

¹⁰ Why Antioch and Edessa? There are a number of reasons. First, as the main center of Christianity in Syria, Antioch served as the primary administrative and cultural center

¹¹ The use of quotations is intentional. See discussion on my use of this term in my Introduction under "A Note on Terminology."

some, these Jewish influences were perceived to be negative as often expressed by enemy accusations of being “too Jewish” or “Judaizing.” For others, Jewish influence provided legitimization of and foundation for their traditions.

I. Antioch: A Test Case

Located on the Orontes River in Syria, Antioch was one of the most important centers for the early Christian movement since at this specific location the followers of Jesus were first referred to as “Christians” (Acts 11:26),¹² a distinct sect within Judaism.¹³ That Judaism successfully spread throughout the area for some centuries and that the earliest Antiochene Christians were predominantly Jewish should not come as a surprise. Josephus notes twice that when Seleucus Nicator founded Antioch in 300 BCE, Jews were among the original settlers and were especially numerous there (C. Ap. 2.39; A.J. 12.119),¹⁴ and that much of Antioch’s attraction for the Jews had to do with its close proximity to Jerusalem (490 km) and geographical position as the stopover city between Palestine and Asia Minor, as well as its function as an important commercial and administrative center.¹⁵ Given the extremely influential presence of Judaism in Syria, our goal is to consider to what extent Syrian Christianity still remained Jewish and how it adopted features that scholars have now come to refer to as “Jewish-Christian” once it began to distinguish itself from its Jewish roots. Such an examination will shed an important light on the Jewish elements attested in our so-called Christian apocrypha, specifically the *Protovangelium of James*.

In particular, I have selected three important sources to examine that provide significant and unique information about the development of

¹² Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken contend that the reference to “speaking the Word to no one except to Jews alone” in Acts 11:19 was Luke’s way of avoiding the impression that Hellenists were responsible for the beginnings of Gentile Christianity, but rather that it was initiated by Greek speaking “Jewish-Christians” (i.e., Cypriots and Cypriots); *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (SBLSBS 13; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1978), 14–16.

¹³ That *christianos* used here should be understood as referring to a branch of Judaism in the same way Pharisees and Sadducees were considered to be within Judaism, see e.g., Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. chp. five and Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. B. Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92.

¹⁴ John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 242.

¹⁵ Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 1.

Christianity in Antioch and its relationship to Judaism: Paul, Matthew, and Ignatius. Interestingly, all three sources attest to conflicts that arose between and among Jews, “Jewish-Christians,” and Gentile Christ-believers in the first and early second century. These conflicts confirm the continued practice of and value placed on Jewish observances (e.g., Levitical laws concerning circumcision, dietary and purity laws, but also Second Temple Jewish *halakhah* including issues of divorce or Sabbath) by certain “Jewish-Christians,” albeit indirectly and mostly from the perspective of those wishing to pull away from maintaining traditional Jewish practices. The purpose of this section is to highlight the major issues and conflicts recorded in these three sources to show evidence of the continued influence of Judaism on Syrian Christianity.

Involving internal disagreements amongst “Jewish-Christians,” the major dispute between Peter/Cephas and Paul over circumcision and dietary laws as recorded in Acts and parts of Galatians provides important information about the influence of Judaism in earliest Antiochene Christianity.¹⁶ Acts 15 includes an account of the events surrounding the issue of circumcision: contrary to Paul’s teachings, some Jewish Christ-believers preached that circumcision was required for all those wishing to be saved. Richard Bauckham writes precisely that the controversy involves only two views: “that of Peter, with which Barnabas and Paul agree, and that of the group who require the circumcision of Gentile converts. There is no indication of a middle way that might envisage two separate Christian communities.”¹⁷ These supporters of James appealed to the council in Jerusalem

¹⁶ Robert Hann argues that when Christianity was first brought to Antioch in the mid-30s, it seems to have been brought by refugees who were seeking asylum from the persecutions in Jerusalem (Acts 11:19). On the first charismatic leaders, see Hann, “Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in the First Century,” *JRH* 14.4 (1987): 341–60. Cf. Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 11–20; see also Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1983, repr. 2003), 32–33 and Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 9–10, who describes the earliest leadership as “wandering charismatics.” On the setting and background of Acts 15, see Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; BAFCS 4; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 462–67. John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 48–57, 49.

¹⁷ Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tension in Early Christianity* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 117.

(i.e., Apostolic Council) and a decision was made by James himself to no longer “trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).¹⁸ The conflict concerning dietary laws the year after, however, does not run as smoothly. Paul’s language in Galatians reveals the following: [1] Cephas and some other “Jewish-Christians” were eating with Christ-believing Gentiles and sharing table-fellowship with them, which most likely included Eucharistic communion;¹⁹ [2] Cephas is condemned by Paul for having been persuaded by James’ representatives to keep Jewish dietary laws for Gentile Christ-believers. Specifically, Cephas and the others give up their table-fellowship with Christ-believing Gentiles when representatives of James arrive;²⁰ [3] Cephas is accused of compelling Christ-believing Gentiles “to live like Jews” (Gal 2:14);²¹ and [4] Paul calls Barnabas and others who follow in Cephas’ footsteps “hypocrites.”²²

Interestingly, Robert Hann argues that Paul’s unusual term to describe Peter’s actions (“to live like Jews”), which is also used elsewhere by Paul to mean “circumcised,” may hint at the possibility that Antiochene non-Jewish Christ-believers were being persuaded to adhere not only to Jewish

dietary laws, but the necessity of circumcision as well.²³ James D.G. Dunn has argued that “to live like Jews” or to “judaize” involved different degrees of Jewish observances, of which circumcision was the most severe.²⁴ For Jerry L. Sumney, the issue at stake described at Galatians 2 has everything to do with the identity of the Christ-believer.²⁵ Since Paul understood the death of Christ as the basis for righteousness for a Christ-believing community, anything that competed in importance had to be rejected, which for Paul included the separation of Jews and Gentiles at the church table since this separation seemed to compete as a way to gain salvation.²⁶ Following Bengt Holmberg, Sumney notes that table fellowship and the identity of those with whom one eats in particular addresses social boundaries since excluding someone from the table excludes them from the group and draws a clear statement about their group identity.²⁷ Mark D. Nanos specifically interprets Paul’s frustrations with “Jewish-Christians” as the result of prioritizing their Jewish identity over their Christ-believing identity.²⁸ In accordance with a number of scholars who have ruled out the possibility that Cephas went so far as to demand the practice of circumcision,²⁹ it seems likely that the question at hand was how Jewish identity should be related to the identity of the Christ-believer.

At the very least, what the disputes at Antioch reveal for us then is that the leadership in Antioch consisted of “Jewish-Christians” (e.g., Peter and later Barnabas who were both influenced heavily by James) who observed

¹⁸ See Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” 91–142 for a recent discussion on the Acts 15 and Gal 2 controversy and the position of James and Peter, but also on Acts 10 and 11 on the “impure” and “profane” state of Gentiles, the core of the Acts 15 and Gal 2 debates.

¹⁹ Among those who argue that the sharing of the Eucharist is also implied include: Justin Taylor, “The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25) and the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11–14),” *NTS* 47.3 (2001): 379; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Eerdmans, 1982), 129; Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (KEK; 12th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 83–84.

²⁰ In accordance with Markus Bockmuehl, Taylor is convinced that at Gal 2:12, Paul clearly implies that this was precisely what James was demanding since James’ intention was to prevent Gentile and Jewish association; “Jerusalem Decrees,” 379 and Bockmuehl, “Antioch and James the Just,” in *James the Just and Christian Origins* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NovTSup 98; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 155–98, esp. 181. cf. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 108–9 who suggests that Cephas’ decision to cease sharing table-fellowship was based on the imposition of the Jerusalem decrees. Also James D.G. Dunn who supposes that the decision was based on an even stricter observance; see “The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–18),” *JSNT* 18 (1983): 3–57, esp. 26.

²¹ Taylor suggests that what Paul takes issue with when he accuses Cephas of “judaizing” is his insistence on Jewish observances for Christ-believing Gentiles even though he himself was no longer observant. Taylor writes, “Cephas no longer had any right to demand Jewish observances of the Gentiles. But now – far worst – he had bowed to James’s demand to cease table-fellowship with them altogether”; “Jerusalem Decrees,” 380.

²² Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” 116–30.

²³ Hann, “Judaism and Jewish Christianity,” 346. Cf. Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” 126.

²⁴ Dunn, “Incident at Antioch,” 3–57, esp. 26. Cf. C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) and Taylor “Jerusalem Decrees,” 380, who argue that the real issue at the heart of the Jerusalem decree disagreement was a concern for the status of Christ-believing Gentiles by Jewish believers in Christ. Taylor suggests specifically that the crisis that occurred in Antioch involved two very different ways of interpreting the Jerusalem decree and thus two very different ways of viewing the status of Gentile believers in Christ in relation to Jewish believers in Christ.

²⁵ Jerry L. Sumney, “Paul and Christ-believing Jews Whom He Opposes,” in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 66.

²⁶ Sumney, “Paul and Christ-believing Jews,” 69.

²⁷ Sumney, “Paul and Christ-believing Jews,” 68; cf. Bengt Holmberg, “Jewish Versus Christian Identity in the Early Church?,” *RB* 105 (1998): 397–425.

²⁸ Mark D. Nanos, “What was at Stake in Peter’s ‘Eating with the Gentiles?’,” in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 317; *idem*, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

²⁹ Betz, *Galatians*, 108–9. So too Bockmuehl, who argues that James’ intervention was not “in any sense designed to promote the circumcision of the Gentiles”; “Antioch and James the Just,” 181; and the scholars discussed above.

Jewish practices and who compelled certain Jewish observances (e.g., not circumcision, but dietary laws) for the Gentile Christ-believing community over and against Paul, and that these observances were being practiced by Antiochene non-Jewish Christ-believers to some degree in the first century.

The conflicts evident among the community in the Gospel of Matthew, written a decade or two after the destruction of the Temple,³⁰ may also shed significant light on the influence of Jewish traditions on Syrian Christianity.³¹ I am aware that a provenance for the gospel of Matthew is still hotly debated in scholarship. However, in accordance with David C. Sim who argues convincingly for an Antiochene provenance for this Gospel

³⁰ Several places have been suggested for its provenance: Palestine, Caesarea Maritima, Phoenicia, Alexandria, and east of the Jordan, Edessa and Antioch. The dominant opinion for Matthew's locale is still Antioch, supported by scholars including Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 172), Brown (*Introduction*, 172), and David C. Sim (*Matthew and Christian Judaism*), 53–62, to name a few. Some scholars have proposed two locations: Palestine and then Antioch after the Jewish war to account for the tensions within the text. Wim Weren, for instance, argues for the area between Lower and Upper Galilee (e.g., Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida) for the first stage of his reconstruction of Matthew's community, and Syria for the second stage, when tension between "Jewish-Christians" and Pharisees were extremely high; "The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community," in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (ed. Huub van de Sandt; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 51–62. The most serious alternative to Antioch as the most likely locale is Galilee. Scholars advocating this position include, J.A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 158–59 and idem, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1996), 16–19; A.J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in Galilee," in *Studies on Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 23–28; Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *JBL* 127.1 (2008): 95–132, and A.M. Gale, *Redefining Ancient Borders: The Jewish Scribal Framework of Matthew's Gospel* (London: T&T Clark Intl., 2005), 41–63.

³¹ General scholarly consensus is that the Gospel of Matthew was written by a "Jewish-Christian" in the decade(s) following the fall of the Temple (80–90 CE); Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 172 and W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998; repr. 2000), 138–47. Recent scholars who argue for a date prior to 70 CE include R.H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 599–609, and J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 14–17. For a detailed discussion, see Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 31–40.

³² In accordance with Davies and Allison, Brown, Sim, and Weren (see n. 30 above), I also favour Syria as a possible locale since Antioch especially seems to have provided a social setting consistent with the various tensions expressed in the gospel.

based on the likelihood that the "Christian Jewish opponents of Ignatius of Antioch were members of the Matthean community some two decades or so after the composition of the Gospel" and Magnus Zetterholm who writes that "while it is not certain that the Gospel originated in Antioch, it is a historical fact that Ignatius not only knew but also used the Gospel of Matthew in some form in the situation in which he lived,"³³ my opinion is that Ignatius knew Matthew and that the version he used was most likely Matthew and not a pre-Matthean tradition.³⁴

If at the very least we place the reception of Matthew in Antioch, then his community still attests to the internal debates with Pharisaic Jews that were characteristic of Antiochene Christianity. Jacob Neusner suggests that whatever success Pharisaic Judaism achieved at conversion is perhaps what triggered conflict between Jews and "Jewish-Christians," since both groups seem to have drawn from the same pool of conversion candidates.³⁵ Wim Weren, however, has argued in his study of the history and social setting of Matthew's community that conflicts between some Pharisees and Matthew's "Jewish-Christians" seem more the result of two parties that adhered to the same basic values, but nevertheless disagreed on the most profound parts of their tradition.³⁶ In other words, although both groups were interested in *halakhic* issues concerning divorce and marriage (Matt 5:27–32; 19:3–9), the purity rules (15:1–9), and the other observance of Sabbath (12:1–14) as well as the importance of appealing to Scripture to justify their views (9:13; 12:3–7; 19:4–5, 7–8), they disagreed vigorously over the role of Jesus.³⁷

³³ See Sim, "Matthew and Ignatius of Antioch," in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries* (ed. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski; LNTS 333; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2008), 140–41 and Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 211. It is for this reason that I will proceed with my discussion of Antiochene Christianity on the basis that Matthew's community most likely came from Antioch, and therefore may attest to Jewish and "Jewish-Christian" conflicts in Antioch.

³⁴ See Meier, "Matthew and Ignatius: A Response to William R. Schoedel," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (ed. D.L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 178–86.

³⁵ Jacob Neusner suggests that rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, which both have their roots in Palestinian Judaism, competed to win over the Jews of the oriental Diaspora and that arguments between these two new groups was often the result of battling for the loyalty of the Jewish masses; *A History of the Jews in Babylonia I* (StPB 9; Leiden: Brill, 1965), 166–69; idem, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Jewish-Christian Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (StPB 19; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1–2; idem, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2003; repr., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 77.

³⁶ Weren, "History and Social Setting," 54–55.

³⁷ For "Jewish-Christians," Jesus had special authority as God's son (Matt 7:29; 8:9; 21:23–27), whereas for some Pharisees, Jesus was an imposter (Matt 27:63) whose

The debates that occurred between these Antiochene Christians and Pharisaic Jews are noteworthy, especially as they relate to their understanding of Judaism. Weren argues that the “Jewish-Christians” of Matthew’s community saw themselves as continuous with the Jewish community and thus were still *intra muros*,³⁸ but that it was only later on (80–90 CE) that they gradually separated themselves from this social framework and developed into a “Jewish branch within a Jesus movement that was not exclusively linked to a particular people.”³⁹ In accordance with Weren, Anders Runesson also argues for the *intra muros* status of Matthew’s community, but takes this concept one step further by arguing in his study on the “Jewish-Christian”⁴⁰ identity of Matthew’s community that the conflicts between Matthew’s community and Judaism were not directed at Jewish society in general (tensions were low both before and after 70 CE), but rather specifically at other Pharisees.⁴¹ According to Runesson, Mattheans were initially part of the Pharisaic association, but they ultimately separated when conflict and tensions became increasingly worse after the war.⁴² What the “Jewish-Christians” represented in Matthew’s community confirm for us is an internal Jewish conflict: the “Jewish-Christians” in Matthew did not understand themselves as arguing against Judaism; rather, they simply saw themselves as better Jews than the Pharisees and therefore the authentic representatives of Jewish scriptures.

In the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch’s writings provide us with further evidence of the influence of Judaism on Antiochene Christianity. Like the information offered to scholars through Paul’s letters and the gospel of Matthew, Ignatius’ letters attest to a third set of major conflicts in Antioch, now involving “Jewish-Christians” and Gentile Christians. The number of groups of opponents to which Ignatius refers in

powers were from Beelzebul (Matt 9:34; 12:24, 27; cf. 10:25); Weren, “History and Social Setting,” 55–56. Note, however, that not all Pharisees would have felt this way since the NT cites several self-proclaimed Pharisees who were also Christ-believers, e.g., Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), Paul (Acts 23:6), and other self-identified Christ-believing Pharisees (Acts 15:5) attest to being both Pharisees but also believers in Christ.

³⁸ For a list of scholars who view the Matthean community as either *intra muros* or *extra muros*, see Runesson’s extensive list in his “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 97 and notes therein.

³⁹ Weren, “History and Social Setting,” 58.

⁴⁰ Note that in his aim at a more precise term, Runesson uses the word “Apostolic Judaism” to indicate a common religio-cultural and ethnic focus for the “religion” displayed in Matthew’s gospel. Accordingly, members of this community or group are referred to as “Apostolic Jews.” See Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” 62–75, esp. 72–73.

⁴¹ On this intragroup conflict, which ultimately results in their separation, see Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 95–132.

⁴² Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 120–32.

his letters has been much debated in scholarly circles. Ignatius’ critiques of his opponents can be generally divided into two categories:⁴³ the “heretical” groups themselves (e.g., docetists; here Ignatius may describe his opponents as “atheists” and those who say that Jesus only “appeared” to suffer [Ign. *Trall.* 10.1]),⁴⁴ and those who participate in improper practice (e.g., those who profess Christ but still maintain Jewish practices [Ign. *Magn.* 8.1–10.3]).

What is most interesting for our inquiry is Ignatius’ attitude towards Judaism.⁴⁵ Of his seven authentic letters, his letter to the Philadelphians and Magnesians may shed light on his view of Jews and Judaism and its relationship to Christianity. In Ign. *Phld.* 6.1–2 Ignatius writes:

But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from a man uncircumcised; both of them, if they do not speak of Christ Jesus, are to me tombstones and graves of the dead on which nothing but the names of men is written. Flee, then, the evil arts and plots of the ruler of this age, lest, wearied by his scheming, you grow weak in love; but all of you, come together with undivided hearts.⁴⁶

Ignatius’ passage raises two important questions: [1] What is the identity of the two men? – i.e., the circumcised man who preaches Christianity and the uncircumcised man who preaches Judaism; and [2] What does Ignatius mean by Judaism and conversely, Christianity? Focusing on these two important questions may shed light on “Jewish Christianity” in second century Antioch and its surrounding areas. C.K. Barrett, Eduard Schweizer, and Jakob Speigl among others have argued that the “uncircumcised man who preaches Judaism” most likely was a member of the Jewish community.⁴⁷

⁴³ On whether or not these two categories represent a single group or two individual groups see Sumney who argues that it depends on whether one reads the letters together or as separate letters; see his “Those Who ‘Ignorantly Deny Him’: The Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch,” *JECS* 1.4 (1993): 347–49.

⁴⁴ Ignatius strongly affirms the balance of the divine/human duality of Christ (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 1.1–2; Ign. *Pol.* 3.1).

⁴⁵ For Ignatius’ views against docetism, see discussion on docetism below.

⁴⁶ All translations of Ignatius are drawn from William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

⁴⁷ Barrett, “Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius,” in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies* (ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 220–44; Eduard Schweizer, “Christianity of the Circumcised and Judaism of the Uncircumcised,” in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies* (ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 245–60; Jakob Speigl, “Ignatius in Philadelphia: Ereignisse und Anliegen in den Ignatiusbriefen,” *VC* (1987): 360–76, esp. 370. See also Robert Hall, “Epispasm and the Dating of Ancient Jewish Writings,” *JSP* 2 (1988): 80 and Peder Borgen, *Philo, John,*

In other words, this certain man may have represented a non-Christian Jewish community that welcomed converts who had not been circumcised. R.M. Grant has also proposed that Ignatius may have had in mind Gentile converts to "Jewish Christianity," "not unlike those who Paul describes as not keeping the law but advocating circumcision (Gal 6:13)."⁴⁸

In opposition to both possibilities, Shaye J.D. Cohen argues that since the "Judaism" being preached to Ignatius' opponents only took place within the context of Christianity and not Judaism, it is more likely that the "uncircumcised preacher of Judaism" was a Gentile Christian who gave too much authority to Jewish scriptures.⁴⁹ In accordance with Cohen, Paul Foster suggests that those whom Ignatius describes were not ethnic Jews or even proselytes to the Jewish faith, but rather were "Gentiles who held to a form of Christian faith that promoted Jewish observance without the necessity of circumcision."⁵⁰ In accordance with Sim and Zetterholm, the

and Paul: *New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (BJS 131; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987).

⁴⁸ R.M. Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Ignatius of Antioch*, vol. 4 (Camden, N.J.: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 103.

⁴⁹ Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Judaism without Circumcision and 'Judaism' without 'Circumcision' in Ignatius," *HTS* 95.4 (2002): 397. Note that when Meeks and Wilken first proposed that Ignatius' issue with Judaism seems to involve Christ-believing Gentiles adopting Jewish practices and not necessarily ethnic Jews who believed in Christ (*Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 20), their interpretation of Ignatius' frustrations with Christ-believers relied on the ethnic distinction between "Jew" and "Gentile" and thus did not consider converts to Judaism or "god-fearers" who may or may not have been "ethnically Jewish." This point is significant given that our sources rarely tell us about the ethnicity of people such that one is left to guess as to what born-Jews might or might not do that differs from Godfearers, Gentiles, etc. On the problems with connecting evidence of Torah-observance with ethnic Jews, see Charlotte E. Fonrobert, "Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Christian Anti-Judaism," in *Late Ancient Christianity* (ed. Virginia Burris; PHC 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 234–54.

⁵⁰ Paul Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch," in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Paul Foster; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007), 91. Cf. Schoedel, who believes that Ignatius had two groups in mind whereby the latter group was most likely uncircumcised Gentile Christ-believers and the former group circumcised "Jewish-Christians." He proposes that perhaps "no one was actually recommending circumcision, and that the issue had probably been injected into the debate under the influence of Pauline models"; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 203. Clearly, the identity of Ignatius' opponents has been hotly debated in scholarship. In addition to the works cited in the discussion above, other recent views include: Schoedel, "Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch," *ANRW* 2.27.1 (1993): 301–30; Charles Munier, "Où en est la question d'Ignace d'Antioche?," *ANRW* 2.27.1 (1993): 404–7 on judaizers and 407–13 on Docetists; Sumney, "Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch," 345–65; Mark Edwards, "Ignatius, Judaism, and Judaizing," *Eranos* 93 (1995): 69–77; Judith Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 23–56; and Michael Goulder, "Ignatius's 'Docetists,'" *VC* 53.1 (1999): 16–30.

identity of the latter group as "Gentile Jesus-believers cloaked as Jews" and the former as "Jesus-believing Jews,"⁵¹ is probably the closest to the truth.

But what did Ignatius mean by "Christianity" and "Judaism"? And to what kind of "Judaism" did he warn his followers not to listen? Three passages in Ignatius' letter to the Magnesians in particular may provide us with a better understanding of Ignatius' use of these terms:

[1] *Ign. Magn.* 8.1: Be not deceived by erroneous opinions nor by old fables, which are useless. For if we continue to live until now according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace.

[2] *Ign. Magn.* 9.1: If, then, those who lived in old ways came to newness of hope, no longer keeping Sabbath, but living in accordance with the Lord's day...

[3] *Ign. Magn.* 10.1–3: (10.1) Let us not be insensible to his goodness! For if he imitates us in our actions, we no longer exist! Therefore let us become his disciples and learn to live according to Christianity. For one who is called by any name other than this, is not of God. (10.2) Set aside, then, the evil leaven, old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted with him to keep anyone among you from being spoiled, since you will be convicted by your odor. (10.3) It is ridiculous to profess Jesus Christ and to Judaize; for Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, into which every tongue that has believed in God has been gathered together.

For Ignatius, Judaism and Christianity are two traditions that should be kept separate, since the latter is superior and has replaced the former and a mixing of the two leads to an incorrect expression of Christianity.⁵² Equally true of Ignatius' understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is his belief that they are still connected, albeit in a one way direction (*Ign. Magn.* 10.3); one can move from Judaism to Christianity, but not the other way around. His anger towards the Magnesians reveals that some Christians have turned the "one way street" relationship between Judaism and Christianity into a "two way highway," which, for Ignatius, has caused a sort of "identity traffic disaster." Namely, as Judith Lieu interprets, "judaizing" is incompatible with having "received grace" and as a failed way to "live according to Jesus Christ."⁵³ More specifically, Ignatius is frustrated with Christians who have not kept Judaism apart from their understanding and practice of Christianity, but instead have practiced judaizing.

⁵¹ Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 205. For a complete discussion on why this scenario is the best option, see his argument on pages 204–11.

⁵² Cohen suggests that Ignatius' understanding of Judaism and Christianity can be described as antithetical categories since (good) Christianity is often contrasted with (bad) Judaism (e.g., Judaism is "the evil leaven, old and sour" and Christianity is "the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ"); Cohen, "Judaism without Circumcision," 398.

⁵³ Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 30–31.

izing even though they continue to "profess Jesus Christ."⁵⁴ As Cohen precisely defines, "'to judaize' does not mean 'to be a Jew' or 'to convert to Judaism'; it means 'to adopt the beliefs and manners of the Jews even though one is not a Jew oneself.'⁵⁵ In this way, Ignatius' problem is not with Judaism per se, but rather with Christians who continue to practice Jewish traditions and beliefs.⁵⁶

Unlike Paul who addressed questions about how Gentiles should relate their beliefs in Jesus to Judaism from a position within Judaism,⁵⁷ and unlike Matthew's "Jewish-Christian" community who debated with Jews, again within the boundaries of Judaism, Ignatius takes a clear position outside Judaism, with the purpose of condemning those who believe in Christ, but who still continue to observe what he considers to be Jewish practices. As Runesson argues, Ignatius' issues with Judaism have everything to do with being "outsiders" and interpreting Paul's letters not from the ethnic aspect of Judaism which Paul, himself did, but from a "Greco-Roman socio-religious perspective" that clearly understood Christ-belief as having nothing to do with Judaism or any specific ethnic identity.⁵⁸ For Ignatius, "judaizing" is not only an indication of misunderstanding the Gospel, but placing oneself outside the reach of the salvation it offers (cf. *Ign. Magn.*

⁵⁴ Based on his use of the "long recension" of Ignatius, Cohen also argues that the statement "for one who is called by any other name other than this, is not of God" is an indication that some Christians in Magnesia not only participated in Jewish practices, but also called themselves Jews and their beliefs Judaism even though they continued to believe in Jesus Christ as saviour; Cohen, "Judaism without Circumcision," 399. On the "long recension" corpus, see Jack Hannah, "The Setting of the Ignatian Long Recension," *JBL* 79.3 (1960): 221–38 and James D. Smith III, "The Ignatian Long Recension and Christian Communities in Fourth Century Syrian Antioch" (PhD diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1985). For a more recent discussion on the long recension, see Foster, "Ignatius of Antioch," 81–84.

⁵⁵ Cohen, "Judaism without Circumcision," 398.

⁵⁶ Although Ignatius is not clear exactly which Jewish traditions he wishes his followers to shun, as *Ign. Magn.* 9.1–2 suggests, the observance of Sabbath in place of or alongside the Lord's Day (Sunday) may very likely have been one of the reasons for Ignatius' annoyance. See Cohen, "Judaism without Circumcision," 402 and n. 23 on the same page.

⁵⁷ Lieu argues that although Ignatius' own language of "judaizing," circumcision and Judaism may evoke comparison with Paul, especially his letter to the Galatians, it does not require us to demand a parallel or continuing situation, since Ignatius is clear that he is not interested in the law or justification; see *Image and Reality*, 42.

⁵⁸ Runesson goes on to explain that this disinterest in converting to the Jewish ethos placed Christ-belief in the context of other Greco-Roman cults and associations whereby ethnic identity no longer mattered. This "re-categorizing" as Runesson puts it, moved the identity of Christians "from the religion of Jewish ethos to a Greco-Roman mystery religion, or a philosophy." On this argument and description of the problem as being an issue of "re-categorization," see Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity," 83–84.

10.1). As Lieu rightly observes, "Ignatius opposes not law and grace, but Judaism and grace."⁵⁹

What do Ignatius' issues with Judaism attest for us then? Lieu reminds us that exploring Ignatius' position on Judaism requires exploring in and behind the letters to help distinguish between the "world of the letters" and reality. According to Lieu, Ignatius' understanding of Judaism is limited. He shows no awareness of the Jews or their Judaism⁶⁰ beyond its role as a system that is in proper relationship with Christianity. But in terms of whether Ignatius' letters actually reflect reality is quite a different story. When Ignatius urges both the Philadelphians and the Magnesians to keep their Christianity separate from Judaism, he likely does so because many still continued to observe practices he deemed Jewish even though they professed Jesus Christ. Although Ignatius argues that the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity should be clear and that the two traditions share no common ground, the vehement nature of his argument demonstrates that this was precisely what was going on not only in Philadelphia and Magnesia, but probably even more intensely in his hometown of Antioch. Sim and Zetterholm both argue that while the letters refer to the local situation in Magnesia and Philadelphia, "Ignatius' concept of the relation between Christians and Jews is no *ad hoc* solution, but emanated from the local situation in Antioch."⁶¹

In the *Protevangelium of James*, Torah observance and Jewish practices, especially those relating to the Temple, are presented as positive and pious, and thus may reflect the kind of continued Jewish presence in Antiochene Christianity fought both by Paul and Ignatius. But as Lieu's study on imagined and real interactions between Jews and Christians encourages us to consider, do these references to Jews and Judaism presented in our text reflect knowledge of "real Jews" and "real Jewish-Christian interactions" or are they literary reconstructions based on images in the Hebrew Bible or simply the result of early Christian imagination and rhetoric? Scholars who reject the idea that the *Protevangelium of James* has real moorings in Judaism often attribute references to Jewish practices in the text, especially those that have been argued to "betray an ignorance of Jewish customs" (e.g., upbringing of Mary in the Temple at *Prot. Jas.* 8:2; bitter water test at *Prot. Jas.* 16:3, etc.) to exactly Lieu's concerns – the

⁵⁹ Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 29.

⁶⁰ E.g., Ignatius only uses the term "the Jews" once in his opening letter to Smyrna (1.2) and only in two of his letters does the question of Judaism in relation to Christianity arise. See Lieu's thorough discussion of these references for understanding Ignatius' view of Judaism; *Image and Reality*, 26–35.

⁶¹ Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 204. So too Meeks and Wilken who suggest that Ignatius' references to Judaism in his letters represent almost certainly his experience of "Jewish-Christians" in Antioch; *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 20.

product of Christian imagination and rhetoric. I suggest that there may be more to these Jewish references and that they may still provide us with some reality of "Jewish-Christian" relations and practices in the late-second or early-third century. This possibility is especially apparent in our text's understanding and presentation of ritual purity.

In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary and her parents are regularly depicted as being acutely aware of their state of purity, especially when they are required to be in the presence of the Lord or in sacred spaces as exemplified by Mary's living arrangements and her leave-taking from the Temple precinct, all of which are in line with biblical ideas about ritual purity. Additionally, Anna and Joachim in particular are often described offering proper sacrifices to the Lord as required by Levitical legislation in order to return to a state of ritual purity. Ideas concerning purity in the text clearly reflect those found in Leviticus (that is religious law) and Second Temple Jewish *halakhah* and are presented in positive terms, particularly in the case of the *Protevangelium of James*' treatment of ritual purity, as it pertains to distinguishing between clean and unclean and being aware of one's ritual state. This concern recalls the description of the conflict over dietary laws in Acts (i.e., as introduced in Acts 11–12), where the concern for the distinction between clean and unclean becomes the push button for the broader issues of distinguishing Jews from Gentiles and of determining the necessary requirements for attaining Christian membership.

The pairing of the terms ἄκαθαρτος and κοινός at *Prot. Jas.* 6:4 is particularly noteworthy since it parallels the use of these same terms in Acts to describe how Peter explains why, as a Jew, he is now able to eat with the uncircumcised (Acts 10:14, 10:28, 11:8). As discussed in Chapter Two, the *Protevangelium of James*' emphasis on ensuring precisely the distinction between clean and unclean may reflect attitudes towards the continued relevance of those biblically-ordained observances that Paul and others held unnecessary and even against God's will for Gentile Christ-believers. In this way, what the *Protevangelium of James* may present here is not simply a desire to include another Jewish feature in order to establish some legitimacy for its writings, but rather reflect a real commitment to the Jewish Scriptures as an important component to our narrative's traditions as a Christ-believing text.⁶²

Significantly, the debate between the Pharisees and Matthew's "Jewish-Christians" may also be reflected in the *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of Judaism, especially in its understanding of laws related to female

⁶² This possibility is, of course, extremely intriguing in light of suggesting a "Jewish-Christian" milieu for our text since the kind of "Jewish Christianity" described above is best represented in James' leadership and the *Protevangelium of James* itself attributes its authorship to the very same James.

purity. In addition to being heavily influenced by the Hebrew Bible/LXX and Torah observance, our discussion in Chapter Three of the text's presentation of Mary's menstrual purity shows that the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas were not only very much aligned with rabbinic, especially tannaitic notions about female purity, but could really only be fully understood within this context. This possible awareness of a rabbinic/protorabbinic Judaism of its time is, of course, extremely interesting in light of the undeniable (though admittedly, complicated) relationship between the Pharisees and their so-called successors, the rabbis. Although the traditional depiction of Pharisaism as a coherent social movement after 70 CE is no longer supported, and scholars like Cohen,⁶³ Martin S. Jaffee,⁶⁴ Seth Schwartz⁶⁵ and Catherine Hezser⁶⁶ convincingly argue that the smooth transition from Pharisaism to rabbinism and the traditional belief that the rabbis became the sole leaders of Jewish society is hardly an accurate depiction of Judaism and the rabbinic movement, they do not deny that there is an important connection between the Pharisees and the rabbis and that there is little doubt that the Pharisees participated to some degree in the shaping of what ultimately became second and third century rabbinism. Jaffee reminds us, for instance, that while "there is no universally accepted account of how the diverse intellectual communities of pre-70 Palestine coalesced by the late second century into the rabbinic community led by Rabbi Yehudah, the Patriarch...it is most likely that at least some Pharisees were included in the post-70 coalition of scribal scholars, priests, administrative officers whose early-third-century CE heirs had begun to form the early literary traditions of rabbinic Judaism."⁶⁷ Additionally, Cohen notes in his discussion of the religious association of the *haburot*, who pay strict attention to the ritual status of food, that this "table fellowship" was probably a relic of the Pharisaic element of rabbinic Judaism.⁶⁸

Given that the rabbinic tradition of interpretation and debate are in some way connected to Pharisaic Judaism, albeit complicatedly, is it possible

⁶³ Cohen, "The Rabbis in Second-Century Jewish Society," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Early Roman Period*, vol. 3 (ed. William Horbury, W.D. Davies, and John Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 922–23.

⁶⁴ Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39–61, esp. 31, 52–61.

⁶⁵ Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 103–4.

⁶⁶ Catherine Hezser, "Social Fragmentation, Plurality of Opinion and Nonobservance of Halacha: Rabbis and Community in Late Roman Palestine," *JSQ* 1 (1993–4): 234–51.

⁶⁷ Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 177 for the first half of the quotation; 41 for the second half.

⁶⁸ Cohen, "Rabbis in Second-Century Jewish Society," 956–57.

that the rabbinic parallels observed in the *Protevangelium of James* are remnants of these interactions? If so, from what stage are they remnants? In the past, scholarly consensus held that Pharisaic Judaism continued to grow after the Destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba Revolt into what is known as the Rabbinic movement and that the Pharisees/rabbis not only put an end to the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, but also to sectarian disputes among Jews so that they stood alone as the sole leaders of Judaism after 70 CE.⁶⁹ On the flip side, the Jesus movement, which was characterized by its relationship to Jews and Judaism in the first century after the Destruction, became dominated by Gentile Christianity, which aligned itself with Pauline theology and was embraced by non-Jews. After the Jerusalem church's alleged flight to Pella, "Jewish-Christianity" no longer held any authority and so the Christianity that emerged was one that was "self-defined as non-Jewish in its theology, its ritual practice, and the ethnicity of its adherents."⁷⁰ In this traditional scenario often referred to as the "Parting of the Ways" model, Pharisees were equated with Rabbis, who became prominent immediately after 70 or 90, and all contact with Christians was thus placed as early as possible, with connections deemed unlikely thereafter. In light of more recent research,⁷¹ the situation may actually be reversed whereby there was possibly continued contact between Jews, Christians, "Jewish-Christians," and Judaizers or even more points of intersection and interaction between these religious groups not only after the first century, but much later into Late Antiquity and even into the Middle

⁶⁹ Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, "Introduction: Traditional Models and New Directions," in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 4.

⁷⁰ Becker and Reed, "Introduction," 4–5 and references therein.

⁷¹ For important critiques of the "Parting of Ways," see the studies offered by Bocharin, "Semantic Differences; or, 'Judaism'/'Christianity,'" in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 65–86; Lieu, "'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality," *JSNT* 17.56 (1995): 101–19; Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135* (ed. James D.G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1–26; Steven Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984): 43–76; Martha Himmelfarb, "The Parting of the Ways Reconsidered: Diversity in Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations in the Roman Empire, 'A Jewish Perspective,'" in *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians through the Ages* (ed. Eugene Fisher; New York: Paulist, 1993), 47–61; John G. Gager, "The Parting of the Ways: A View from the Perspective of Early Christianity: 'A Christian Perspective,'" in *Interwoven Destinies*, 62–73; Paula Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways?' Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 35–64; and Becker, "Beyond the Spatial and Temporal Lines: Questioning the 'Parting of the Ways' Outside the Roman Empire," in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 373–92.

Ages. The *Protevangelium of James*' awareness and seeming acceptance of rabbinic/proto-rabbinic ideas (esp. *m. Niddah* and *m. Ketuboth*) especially in its presentation of Mary's menstrual purity⁷² may confirm for us another point of interaction between Jews and Christians possibly into the early third century, a time when both traditions continued to impact one another in meaningful ways.

Although scholars repeatedly acknowledge how little we know about the history of Christianity in Syria during the early period, many indicators point to the fact that elements particular to "Jewish Christianity" such as biblical regulations concerning purity, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath observance as well as day- to- day *halakhic* issues concerning divorce (e.g., Matt 5:27–32; 19:3–9), for instance, remained influential in Syria until as late as the seventh century.⁷³ Hann suggests, for example, that this influence is evident in Hegesippus' attestation that certain Christians in Syria were using a Gospel of Hebrews in the mid-second century⁷⁴ and that the "Jewish-Christian" Gospel of Peter was well known by the Antiochene Christians by the end of the second century.⁷⁵ Throughout the third century, too, evidence indicates that *Kerygma Petrou* traditions were being circulated throughout Syria.⁷⁶ In particular, Markus Bockmuehl's study on Syrian memories of Peter examines, alongside Ignatius (early second century) and Justin (mid-second century), Serapion, the bishop of Antioch c 190–211 (the end of the second, beginning of the third century) who confirms that the Gospel of Peter was being read by some groups, even though Serapion himself seems not to have read it until it was brought to his attention in Cilicia.⁷⁷ Additionally, Sebastian Brock argues for four main areas

⁷² Specifically, Cohen notes that although the rabbis claimed judicial authority over various areas of life, they were most often consulted about the laws of purity, tithing, marriage, and divorce. In certain situations, the Jews took the rabbis' opinion to be authoritative, but in other matters there was no use for them. For women in particular, Cohen writes that the rabbis were often consulted and deemed authoritative over marriage contracts, menstruation, and purity laws. Menstruation and purity laws are precisely discussed in our text and the rabbis' value on family life is reinforced on several occasions throughout the text; "Rabbis in Second-Century Jewish-Society," 946–47 and 976.

⁷³ Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 18.

⁷⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.22–28; Hann, "Judaism and Jewish Christianity," 357.

⁷⁵ Our knowledge of this use is based on its rejection by Bishop Serapion around 200 CE as attested by Eusebius in *Hist. eccl.* 4.12; Hann, "Judaism and Jewish Christianity," 358.

⁷⁶ Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 211.

⁷⁷ Ironically, the use of Peter in Syria at the end of the second/ beginning of the third century is only known to us because Serapion writes that he must retract his earlier permission to this group to read this gospel because he has discovered that it is now heretical. This document is partially preserved by Eusebius' address in his letter addressed to

of Syriac literature that continue to incorporate Jewish traditions. They include: [1] the Peshitta, especially the Pentateuch and Chronicles;⁷⁸ [2] the targumic traditions known to early Syriac writers that are not from the Peshitta; [3] apocrypha and pseudepigrapha of Jewish origins; and [4] commentaries, poetry, chronicles, and OT "hagiography."⁷⁹

The evidence cited above suggests that the picture of Antiochene Christianity in the first three centuries of the Common Era was influenced by Judaism in terms of its concern for biblical law (especially concerning purity regulations and dietary restrictions), its interest in early Jewish *halakhah*, its interactions and close association with Pharisaic/proto-rabbinic groups, and even possibly in the self-identification of some believers in Jesus as Jewish (cf. Ign. *Magn.* 4.1 and Cohen's argument above). Indeed, when Christianity first came to Antioch it drew converts from among the mass of Jews who had already settled on the land centuries before and who seem still to have valued the practices and customs of their past tradition. The conflict among "Jewish-Christians" described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, the disputes between Matthew's "Jewish-Christian" community and the Pharisees/proto-rabbis, and Ignatius' frustrations with judaizing Christians attest that throughout the first and into the second century, Syri-

the church nearby Rhossus in Cilicia (*Hist. eccl.* 6.12.3–6). On the influence of the Gospel of Peter and Peter traditions in Syria, see Bockmuehl, "Syrian Memories of Peter: Ignatius, Justin and Serapion," in *The Image of Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (ed. Peter J. Tomson and Dorris Lambers-Petry; WUNT 158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 124–42.

⁷⁸ Referencing the Peshitta as evidence of the continued influence of Judaism in Syrian Christianity in support of our suggestion of a Syrian provenance for our text is, of course, tricky in that it ironically raises an important question; namely, why might the *Protevangelium of James* use the LXX and not the Peshitta if it is indeed Syrian in provenance? To this, I offer two possible explanations. First, Syrian culture was known to be thoroughly bilingual. According to Drijvers, Greek was widely spoken and understood, especially in urban centers like Antioch, but so too was Aramaic as the evidence of the Greek and Aramaic inscriptions from Palmyra show. Secondly, we know that since most Syrian schools (this is especially true of Edessa) read Greek works of philosophy and rhetoric in Greek, but taught mainly in Syriac, that there existed, as Drijvers has argued "a continuous process of translation from Greek into Syriac and the other way around" so that "every one of the Christian works written in the religion between Antioch and Edessa during the second and third centuries is known in a Greek as well as in a Syriac version. It is often hard to tell which version has priority...." This was true of Bardaisan's treatises and is evident in the gospel harmony known as the Diatessaron, a single woven account of the Greek Gospels in Syriac. The bilingual character of Syrians may also supplement the evidence for the *Protevangelium of James*' origins in this area since the next earliest attestation to our text after the Greek original is Syriac. See Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 125–26; on the Syrian translation of the *Protevangelium of James*, see Chapter One.

⁷⁹ Sebastian Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979): 212–32.

an Christianity continued to be influenced by both biblical theology, belief, and ritual practice as well as early Jewish *halakhah* despite its transition in membership that consisted mainly of "Jews who practiced Judaism, but believed in Christ" to "Gentiles who believed in Christ but practiced certain forms of Judaism." As Ignatius' letters denouncing the practice of Jewish observance by Gentile Christians (e.g., Ign. *Phld.* 6.1; Ign. *Magn.* 8.1; 9.1; and 10.1–3) suggest, Judaism continued to play an important role in the formation of Christianity even despite the belief by some (i.e., Ignatius) of its separation from Judaism, which as recent research and our discussion has shown did not occur until much later. To continue building our case for a Syrian provenance for our text, we will now turn to other aspects common to Syrian Christianity.

C. The *Protevangelium of James* and Syrian Christianity

In this section, I re-examine the interests and concerns of the *Protevangelium of James*, but this time in light of other features characteristic of Syrian Christianity such as the role of Marcionism and Docetism on the one hand, and Asceticism and Marriage, on the other. This inquiry will be followed by an important examination of the established Syrian source of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in order to draw specific parallels between it and the *Protevangelium of James*, especially their concerns for ritual and menstrual purity. Finally, I consider Mary and the view of women in Syrian Christianity to help further support the possibility of a Syrian provenance.

I. "Marcionism and Docetism:" Edessa

Hans W.J. Drijvers argues that by the second and third centuries, Christianity in Edessa was heavily influenced by the leadership of dominant figures such as Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani.⁸⁰ Given that Marcionism enjoyed extreme success in second century Syria, it is perhaps most appropriate to start with Marcion and his teachings to show what his contemporaries and future adversaries refuted so vigorously and more importantly, to see if his ideas were influential in our text.⁸¹ Marcion's *Antitheses*, his

⁸⁰ Drijvers, "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *JJS* 36 (1985): 88–102, esp. 96.

⁸¹ Although he never took up residency there, Marcion and his church became so influential that the *Chronicles of Edessa* record "in the year 449 [of the Seleucid era, i.e., 137/138 C.E.] Marcion left the Catholic Church" (quoted from Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *SecCent* 6 [1987–88]: 153). Justin writes in his apology in the year 150 that Marcion's false teachings have already spread to the whole

only work known to us, is accessible from what we can deduce from Tertullian's five volumes against Marcion.⁸² Fortunately, we are also able to decipher other important Marcionite teachings and ideas from other early Christian leaders, among whom Bardaisan (154–222 CE)⁸³ and Ephrem (306–373 CE)⁸⁴ are the most important for our purposes, since their writings reflect Marcion's teaching in an Edessene setting.⁸⁵

The opposition to Marcion in the works of Bardaisan, the philosopher from the court of King Abgar of Edessa, appears to confirm Marcion's success in Edessa in particular. Probably best known for his *Dialogue on Fate*, which later was renamed *The Book of the Law of Countries*, Bardaisan's theology, which can be described as an amalgamation of Christianity, astrology, cosmology and classical and Persian philosophy, was extremely popular in Edessa evidenced by his large following.⁸⁶ Bardaisan's questioning of the oneness of God hints strongly towards his intention of producing an anti-Marcionite response to Marcion's ideas concerning his notions of two different Gods.⁸⁷ In opposition to Bardaisan who argued that there is only one God who is Creator and Saviour, Marcion preached a distinction between the Creator God of the "Old Testament" and the Jews, and the Supreme God of the "New Testament" and his messenger Christ. Specifically, Marcion's understanding of the two Gods involved a belief that the Creator God was imperfect and jealous and that the Supreme God was an unknown and good God. Against this belief, Bardaisan defended

human race (*I Apol.* 26.5–6). Tertullian, too, claims that Marcion's heretical tradition has influenced the whole world (*Marc.* 5.10).

⁸² Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 90–91; Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 195–96.

⁸³ Sidney Griffith, "Christianity in Edessa and the Syriac-Speaking World: Mani, Bar Daysan and Ephraem; The Struggle for Allegiance on the Aramean Frontier," *JCSSS* 2 (2002): 5–20.

⁸⁴ On Ephrem, see n. 131 below.

⁸⁵ Hippolytus writes in *Haer.* 7.31, for instance, that the Marcionite Prepon, an Assyrian, wrote against Bardaisan; and according to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.30), Bardaisan in turn wrote dialogues against Marcionites. Additionally, Ephrem's *Hymni contra Haereses* and *Prose Refutations* against Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani make clear that the leaders who dominated the religious scene in second century Syria continued to be influential even into the fourth century when Ephrem was writing.

⁸⁶ According to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.30), Bardaisan was first attached to the school of Valentinus, but after his conversion to Christianity refuted and fought against the group. On Bardaisan's ideas on cosmology and soteriology, see Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966); idem, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 131–32.

⁸⁷ In his *Dialogue on Fate*, Bardaisan's opening sentence has a certain Awida ask "If God is one." For commentary and translation, see Drijvers, ed., *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 4–5 and Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 154.

the existence of one God who was at the same time good and the Creator of the world; he preached instead that the other powers of lower rank were responsible for evil and deficiencies in the world made from matter (material world).⁸⁸ This concept of evil matter is extremely important to Ephrem's interpretation of Marcion's theology as evident by the fact that it is allotted significant space in Ephrem's writings.

Although Ephrem's polemical writings against Marcion reflect the afterlife of his teachings, they contain, as Drijvers puts it, "unique and precise information" that has "not yet been fully exploited in reconstructing and characterizing Maricon's original doctrine and its later developments."⁸⁹ According to Ephrem (*Hymn c. Haer.* 3.7), Marcion ascribes to not two, but three principles: [1] the Stranger, God of perfect goodness and grace; [2] the Creator, God of jealousy; and [3] Hyle, evil matter that stands for the visible and created world. In *Hymn c. Haer.* 48, Ephrem deals explicitly with Marcion's ideas concerning cosmology that credit the Creator and the evil Hyle for the creation of the world and mankind.⁹⁰

While Bardaisan and Marcion disagree on the concept of God as one good Creator God or two opposite Gods, it seems clear that they agree on the view of matter as evil.⁹¹ For this reason Marcion's beliefs on the phenomenon of Jesus have been interpreted by many as docetic.⁹² Clement of Alexandria who is the first to use the abstract noun δόκησις (*Strom.*

⁸⁸ Drijvers argues that the anti-Marcionite tendency of Bardaisan's dialogue also appears in two other sources: The *Vita of Abercius of Hierapolis* and the *Grundschrift* of the *Pseudo-Clementine* as recorded in *Recognitions* 9:19–29. On how these two sources testify to the anti-Marcionite character of Bardaisan's dialogue, see Drijvers' discussion in his "Marcionism in Syria," 155.

⁸⁹ Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 156–57.

⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion on Marcion's religious doctrines especially as they relate to the three roots and to his ideas concerning cosmology, refer to Drijvers' "Marcionism in Syria," 161–72.

⁹¹ For this reason Ephrem determined that Bardaisan himself was the author of a formidable system of thought, even though he did compose polemical works against Marcion. On Ephrem's views on Bardaisan and Marcion, see Griffith, "Christianity in Edessa," 5–20, esp. her section on "Edessa's Early Christian Teachers."

⁹² While docetism has been labeled as one of the major Christian "heresies," Guy G. Stroumsa notes that its origins are still very much unknown. Stroumsa asserts that "docetism" does not reflect a fixed set of doctrines, a clearly definable sect, or even a precise body of beliefs. Rather, "docetism" should be defined as an "attitude shared by various individuals and movements at the origins of Christianity"; Ronnie Goldstein and Stroumsa, "The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism: A New Proposal," *ZAC* 10.3 (2007): 423. So too, Stroumsa, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered," *JECS* 12.3 (2004): 267–68, which covers the same material.

3.17.102) describes "docetism" as related to those who claim that birth is evil and for those whom the body of Christ was psychic.⁹³

Marcion's docetic ideologies are only known to us from the writings of his opponents. According to Tertullian (*Marc.* 4.10.6–7), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 433.2.5), and Hippolytus (*Haer.* 10.19), Marcion seems to have taught that Jesus' historical and bodily existence was not true reality but semblance and that his human existence and suffering was also not real, but an illusion, since for Marcion, Christ was not human, but wholly divine. Convinced that Marcion's canon consisted of Pauline letters and a mutilated version of the canonical gospel of Luke,⁹⁴ Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus among others all insisted that since Marcion's gospel only began with Luke 3:1 ("In the fifteenth year of Tiberius"),⁹⁵ Marcion's "omission" of significant sections of the first four chapters, which highlight Jesus' birth and details concerning his nativity, genealogy, and even his baptism and temptation, was his way of rejecting Jesus' human attributes by denying his birth and restricting his resurrection to only his soul (*Tert. Marc.* 4.10.6–7).⁹⁶ If according to Hippolytus and Irenaeus, Marcion believed "that he [Jesus] was revealed as a man, though not a man, and as being in a body when not in a body, manifest in appearance only, subject to no nativity or passion, except only in appearance" (*Hipp. Haer.* 10.19), and "was a man merely in appearance" (*Iren. Haer.* 4.33.2.5), Jesus for Marcion could not have been born of a woman if his humanity was only semblance. In-

⁹³ Goldstein and Stroumsa, "Origins of Docetism," 424. On the problematic terminology and designation of "Docetic" and "Docetism" see Norbert Brox, "'Doketismus'-eine Problemanzeige," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 95(1984): 306.

⁹⁴ E.g., *Iren. Haer.* 27.2.6: "Besides all this he [Marcion] mutilated the Gospel according to Luke, discarding all that is written about the birth of the Lord, and discarding also many of the Lord's discourses containing teaching in which it is most clearly written that the Lord confessed His Father as the Maker of the universe."

⁹⁵ For a helpful list of Marcion's omissions and alterations of Luke's gospel and Paul's Epistles, see Ernest Evans, ed. and trans., *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem: Books VI–V*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 643–46.

⁹⁶ In his recent inquiry into Marcion's gospel and its relationship to the gospel of Luke, Joseph B. Tyson reminds us that we should be wary of Marcion's opponents' accusations that he simply selected one of the four canonical gospels and excised large sections from it and elevated it above the other three. Given that Marcion lived at a time when Christian thought and practice were still marked by great diversity, especially in the East, Tyson insists that it would be anachronistic and misleading to assume the gospels were part of an authoritative canon at this time. Rather Tyson suggests that since it is plausible that Marcion did in fact choose one gospel out of several that were known to him (probably a version of Luke that was known in his region, since there is significant overlap between the two gospels), it is better to think of this gospel not as "formal collections of gospels [but as] books in various editions, with unstable texts"; *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 39–40.

deed, Irenaeus tells us that Marcion believed and taught that Jesus had passed through the body of his mother "as water through a tube" (*Haer.* 2.24.4: *quasi aquam per tubum* [SC 211, 146, 19 ff. Rousseau/Doutreleau/καθάπερ ὕδωρ δια σωλῆνος [147, 64f. Rousseau/Doutreleau]).⁹⁷

Indeed, what many of our sources of Syrian provenance tell us is that a significant portion of them can be interpreted as writings either against Marcion specifically, or against the promotion of docetic ideas, in general. For our purposes, perhaps the docetic stance that denied Jesus' physical body is most relevant for our interest in Mary, especially as she is portrayed in the *Protevangelium of James*. More than any other Christian writer, Tertullian strongly stressed the relationship between the flesh of Mary and the flesh of her son Jesus to the extent that he denied that Mary remained a virgin in giving birth; although he recognized Mary's virginity in the sense of not having sexual intercourse, he argued that she no longer remained a virgin when she gave birth.⁹⁸

In his rhetorical reexamination of Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*, especially chapter 23, Geoffrey D. Dunn argues that Tertullian's motive in denying Mary's virginity *in partu* was directly connected to defending, against docetic adversaries, the reality of Jesus' flesh and human nature and the theological notion that salvation must come through him. For Tertullian, establishing Jesus' flesh at his birth proved the resurrection of Jesus' body and thus allowed the possibility for the resurrection of the dead.⁹⁹ Tertullian's refutation of Marcion meant an emphasis not only on

⁹⁷ While anti-Marcionite writings provide us with important information on docetism in Syria, other important witnesses to docetism in Syria are Ignatius' opponents in his letters. Earlier, we determined that Ignatius' opponents could be characterized by [1] heresy: those of schism and wrong belief who conflict over the reality or unreality of Jesus' human body and experiences; and [2] practice of Judaism. Lieu questions succinctly, "Were there two separate (heretical) patterns of belief or do they represent a single 'judaizing docetism'?" Goulder argues for the latter interpretation; for Goulder, the evidence for docetism in Ignatius' writings is directly connected to "Judaism" and "Judaizers." Goulder cites, for instance, Ignatius' letter to Magnesia to make his point. He writes that when Ignatius attacks those who continue to observe Sabbaths in addition to or over the Lord's Day in *Ign. Magn.* 9 and then reproaches those who continue to "Judaize" in *Ign. Magn.* 10, he follows with a "sugarcoated" warning in *Ign. Magn.* 11 to the very same opponents who question Jesus' birth, suffering and resurrection, thus arguing that they are one in the same; for Goulder, Ignatius' anti-docetic warnings are directly connected to Jewish praxis and belief. For more on this topic, see Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 26 and Goulder, "Ignatius' 'Docetists,'" 16–30 and earlier discussion.

⁹⁸ Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin in Patristic Thought* (trans. Thomas Buffer; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 65.

⁹⁹ Dunn, "Mary's Virginity in Partu and Tertullian's Anti-Docetism in *De Carne Christi* Reconsidered," *JTS* 58.2 (2007): 468–69. On various readings of *De Carne Christi* as a response to Marcion's, Apelles', and Valentinus' ideas on the reality of Christ's flesh, see 470–76.

Jesus' flesh, but also the reality of his nativity since Mary provided the flesh with which Jesus was born (*Carn. Chr.* 20.3), reinforced by the fact that Jesus had an umbilical cord and nursed at his mother's breast. Tertullian argued that since Jesus had both human flesh and divine spirit (*Carn. Chr.* 18.1b-2), the first from his mother and the second from God, a normal birth alongside a miraculous conception was necessary to guarantee the true divinity and humanity of Christ and thus to actively refute docetic ideology that claimed otherwise.

Can the *Protevangelium of James* also be read as an anti-docetic or more specifically, as an anti-Marcionite response? I suggest that this interpretation is a real possibility on two levels. First, given the detailed description of Mary's physical, pregnant body and the child Jesus nursing at her breast along with the text's emphasis on details surrounding Mary's genealogy, childhood, and adolescent years, and interactions with the Jewish Temple, the *Protevangelium of James* can be convincingly read, on one level, as a possible response to docetic claims about the body of Jesus. Perhaps the one questionable aspect attested in our text that would tell against this reading is Mary's *virginitas in partu* and *post-partum*. For Tertullian, while Mary's virginity *ante partum* could be confirmed, her virginity *in partu* had to be forfeited to argue effectively for Jesus' humanity and thus against docetic claims that his body was not real. In the *Protevangelium of James*, the conception and birth of Jesus are both presented as miraculous in the narrative (e.g., Mary conceives through the Holy Spirit; there is no pain mentioned during the birth; and she remains a virgin before, during, and after the birth), and yet there is nothing in the text that suggests docetism – miraculous happenings, yes, but not docetism. Indeed, the narrative even tells us of the discomfort Mary feels before she is about to give birth, and a very physical gynecological examination is performed on her after the birth.

Significantly, the idea of Mary's miraculous (i.e., *virginitas in partu*) birth is also attested in four other early sources of probable Syrian provenance,¹⁰⁰ two of which may also support Mary's *virginitas post-partum* and may help strengthen our argument that our text can be read, at least on one level, as an anti-docetic document: Ode 19 of *Odes of Solomon* and the *As-*

¹⁰⁰ Joseph C. Plumpe examines five little-known early witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in partu*: [1] Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 54; [2] Ignatius' *To the Ephesians* 19.1; [3] *The Ascension of Isaiah*; [4] the *Protevangelium of James*; and [5] Ode 19 of the *Odes of Solomon*. Among the five examined, three are of probable Syrian origin, which strengthens the possibility that our text (the fourth witness) may be of Syrian origin. See Plumpe, "Some Little-Known Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in Partu*," *TS* 9.4 (1948): 567-77.

cension of Isaiah.¹⁰¹ Darrell D. Hannah suggests that although the language of Odes 28 and 42 as well as similar passages may indicate that the author of the Odes was influenced by docetic ideology, the birth of Jesus described in Ode 19 depicts a birth that is miraculous but still very much human:¹⁰²

The womb of the Virgin caught [it],
and she conceived and gave birth.
And the Virgin became a mother in great compassion
and she was in labor and bore a son.
And she felt no pains/grief,
because it was not useless/for no reason.
And she did not require a midwife,
because he [viz., God] kept her alive / like a man.
She brought forth by/in the will [of God]
and brought forth by/in [his] manifestation
and acquired by/in [his] great power
and loved by/in [his] salvation
and guarded by/in [his] kindness
and made known by/in [his] greatness.
Hallelujah. (Ode 19:6-11).¹⁰³

Like the *Protevangelium of James*, Ode 19 depicts Mary's pregnancy as miraculous since she does not need a midwife and suffers no pain,¹⁰⁴ but

¹⁰¹ Admittedly, for both writings, there is little consensus as to whether a docetic or "proto-orthodox" Christology is represented.

¹⁰² Darrell D. Hannah cites Lactantius's use of Ode 19 at the end of the third century as a proof-text for the virgin birth and as an indication that it was accepted by mainstream Christianity. He argues that it would be unlikely that Lactantius would have cited this Ode if he thought it was a witness to a docetic birth; "The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christology," *VC* 53.2 (1999): 165-96, esp. 185. So too Drijvers who also proposes that there is a connection between Ode 19 and the Diatessaron viz., "Ode 19 is therefore based on exegetical and theological traditions that are found in the Diatessaron and the structure and wording of Ode 19 are comprehensible only through the underlying Diatessaron"; "The 19th Ode of Solomon: Its Interpretation and Place in Syrian Christianity," *JTS* 31.2 (1980): 337-55, esp. 351.

¹⁰³ Translation from Matthew Lattke, *The Odes of Solomon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009), 268-84. James H. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (ed. James H. Charlesworth; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 752-53 was also consulted.

¹⁰⁴ Hannah argues that the painless birth motif may be connected to Jewish traditions of a painless birth attributed to Moses. He questions whether this tradition was originally Jewish and then transferred to Christ and suggests that it is not difficult to image that this Jewish tradition was taken up by "Jewish-Christians" and applied to Jesus. Hannah suggests an interesting connection between the painless childbirth tradition he sees in the three writings discussed above (*Ode 19*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and *Protevangelium of James*) and the Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch*, which was roughly contemporary with the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Namely, the *Apocalypse of Baruch* asserts that in the messianic age

also as real since she still “conceived and bore” and “was in labour.” Joseph C. Plumpe also suggests that the references to Mary’s virgin birth, the painlessness, and the non-necessity of a midwife along with her giving birth “like a man” with her own desire or will,¹⁰⁵ alludes to Mary’s *virginitas in partu* and possible *virginitas post-partum*.¹⁰⁶ In accordance with the idea that Mary’s birth should also be interpreted as real and physically experienced, Jennifer Glancy suggests that the text’s reliance on dissonant gender imagery (i.e., Mary gives birth like a man) may help explain and interpret Mary’s painless birth. Drawing on ideas surrounding the code of masculinity in the ancient Mediterranean world which looked at mastery of others and of self as its hallmark, Glancy interprets Mary’s painless birth as a will towards self-mastery. Mary’s birth of her son is not without purpose and so while she does experience childbirth, she does not acknowledge pain.¹⁰⁷

In the *Ascension of Isaiah*’s description of the event, the birth happens so quickly that K. Froehlich refers to it as a “miraculous appearance” rather than a birth, since the text describes Mary being astounded by the sudden manifestation of the child:¹⁰⁸

And he (Joseph) did not approach Mary, but kept her as a holy virgin, although she was pregnant. And he did not live with her for two months. And after two months of days, while Joseph was in the house, and Mary his wife, but both alone, it came about, when they were alone, that Mary then looked with her eyes and saw a small infant, and she was astounded. And after her astonishment had worn off, her womb was found as (it was) at first, before she had conceived (*Ascen. Isa.* 11:5–14).¹⁰⁹

The *Ascension of Isaiah*’s attestation of Mary’s virginity and the allusion to her remaining a virgin following the delivery since “after her astonishment had worn off, her womb was found as (it was) at first, before she had

the curse of Eve will be reversed and women will no longer endure pain at childbirth; “*Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity*,” 186.

¹⁰⁵ Specifically, Plumpe argues that in the verse where the word “man” in Syriac corresponds not to ἄνθρωπος (*homo*), but to ἄνηρ (*vir*), that the conception was the result of Mary’s own will in cooperation with God’s will since “human births ordinarily are dependent on the will and the initiative of the man, the father; but Mary bore her Son independent of the antecedent will of a man or human father.” See Plumpe, “Some Little-Known Early Witnesses,” 576.

¹⁰⁶ Plumpe, “Some Little-Known Early Witnesses,” 576.

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96–99.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 276. The chapter in which this observation is cited is based on a discussion that was led by E. Pagels and K. Froehlich. The first draft of the chapter in question was written by K. Froehlich.

¹⁰⁹ Translation from M.A. Knibb, “Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 174–75.

“conceived” deserves special note. Along with the *Protevangelium of James* and *Ode 19*, the *Syrian Ascension of Isaiah* serves as another important witness to Mary’s *virginitas post-partum*, an interest seemingly prevalent in Syria.

Hannah argues that although the description is indeed miraculous, a real birth is still being depicted and cites several reasons why. First, Mary is pregnant and her womb is described as returning to its normal size after the birth. Second, the text mentions twice that Mary “is with child.” Third, Mary’s conception is discussed by the author.¹¹⁰ Glancy also argues for the corporeality (and thus against a docetic reading) of Mary’s postpartum body and her son Jesus, albeit from a different angle. She reads Mary’s painless birth in the *Ascension of Isaiah* as being consistent with the ideas on the construction of bodies of the prophet-seer Isaiah and the Beloved of the same writings. That is, bodies in this text are not true selves but rather are “bodies that shed their histories.”¹¹¹ In other words, “[Mary’s] body experiences pregnancy but reforms itself to deny that experience”¹¹² – they are bodies that forget what their bodies have experienced. What these two Syrian sources attest for us then is that Mary’s *virginitas in partu* and *post-partum* can be convincingly read as miraculous rather than docetic. In this way, the *Protevangelium of James* affirms a reading that emphasized both Jesus’ humanity (e.g., his mother’s physical pregnancy and his genealogical connections) and his divinity (e.g., Mary’s miraculous conception and status as *virginitas in partu* and *post-partum*), and thus a writing that could be readily interpreted as a response to docetism.

Second, I suggest that the text’s massive expansion of the infancy chapters in Luke (and Matthew) and its presentation of the Jewish characters and traditions in the narrative as positive can also be interpreted as a direct response to Marcion’s rejection of Luke’s infancy chapters and complete denial of Matthew’s gospel as a whole specifically. As mentioned earlier, Marcion’s gospel is only accessible to us through the works of his adversaries. Adolf von Harnack’s reconstruction of Maricon’s gospel based on these accounts is probably the most well-known and cited, and although it has been heavily criticized,¹¹³ still remains an unsurpassed resource.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Hannah, “*Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity*,” 181–84. Cf. Enrico Norelli’s study which argues that the text reflects the work of docetic Christians, possibly Ignatius of Antioch’s opponents whom he writes vehemently against in his letters to the Smyrnaeans and Trallians; *Ascension du prophète Isaïe. Traduction, introduction et notes* (Apocryphes Collection de poche de l’AELAC 2; Turnhout: Brepols, 1993).

¹¹¹ Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 99–106.

¹¹² Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 106.

¹¹³ Adolf von Harnack’s reconstruction is considered maximalist and has been frequently criticized for various reasons including his less than critical acceptance of Tertullian’s criticism and that he was influenced by his belief that Marcion used a canonical

Although Joseph B. Tyson warns us that determining the wording of Marcion's gospel in Harnack's reconstruction should be approached with some hesitancy,¹¹⁵ he also insists that "we can be reasonably confident about the inclusion or exclusion of the larger discourses and narratives" and notes that the "most certain observation to be made about the Gospel of Marcion is that it lacks an account of Jesus' birth and infancy."¹¹⁶ In other words, Marcion's gospel provides no information about the predictions of the birth of Jesus or John, of Jesus' parents, of the circumstances of his birth, of his circumcision and presentation at the temple, of the infancy narratives or of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. Even John the Baptist's imprisonment, the baptism of Jesus, and the genealogies are not attested.

If we remember our discussion above concerning the characteristics of Marcion's theology that conception and birth were considered evil and were associated with the Creator God and material world, Marcion's rejection of the material found in Luke 1–2 is not difficult to imagine since it would separate Jesus from the Creator God and its associations. Indeed these "omissions" from Luke 1–2 also served specifically to distance Jesus from his Jewish heritage, since his relations to John the Baptist, his own father, and Zechariah the priest are not mentioned, nor are his mother's observance of post-partum purification or the practice of circumcision discussed. In accordance with Tyson, I maintain that these "omissions" agree with what we know of Marcion's theology, which aimed at separating Christianity from its Jewish roots more generally.

The *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of Jesus' Jewish roots via his parent's and grandparent's Davidic lineage and their participation in the Jewish traditions and customs of their time seems to be a direct re-

Luke as his source. On other important criticisms, see David S. Williams' six point criticism of Harnack's reconstruction in "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," *JBL* 108 (1989): 377–96.

¹¹⁴ Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche* (2d ed.; TU 45; Leipzig, Hinrichs 1924).

¹¹⁵ In his reconstruction of Marcion's gospel, Harnack, like Tertullian, uses the canonical Luke as a base and thus his reconstruction follows its order. Using John Knox's list of verses in the Gospel of Marcion that overlap with Luke (*Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942], 86), Harnack argues that the two gospels overlapped 60 percent of the time (75 percent of the time if one were to count Knox's 184 additional verses that were unattested by earlier witnesses). He also notes, though, that of the most significant differences between the two gospels, Maricon's account has nothing comparable to Luke 1–2 and very little from Luke 3:1–4:15 so that the only verse shared between Luke and Marcion (i.e., 3:1) becomes the beginning verse of his gospel; *Marcion*, 165–222.

¹¹⁶ Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts*, 43.

sponse to many of Marcion's teachings. Instead of distancing Jesus from his Jewish heritage, the Torah, and the Hebrew Scriptures, our text celebrates it all. Indeed our text expands not only the infancy details offered by Luke, but also those offered in Matthew: Jesus' lineage is not only represented, but his Davidic lineage is traced directly through his mother Mary; circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth and infancy are accounted in our text, but so is a detailed description of his mother's birth and her infancy; Zechariah the priest is only one of the many priests and Jewish characters described who are all portrayed in a positive light and are associated with the Temple and its sacrifices; finally, post-partum purification and the general concern for ritual purity and purity laws outlined in Leviticus are not only represented in our text, but are the unifying and dominant theme in the *Protevangelium of James* as I have argued throughout this study. To be sure, these details in the *Protevangelium of James* would have given Marcion much cause for distress to say the least.

Can the *Protevangelium of James* be considered a product of the same Syrian milieu? Its description of the miraculous but very real birth of Jesus seems to fit well with the other witnesses to his birth in Syrian texts as does its overall focus on providing an argument for Jesus' humanity via the historical account of Mary's life,¹¹⁷ if it indeed was influenced by the docetic presence in Syria. But does our text show signs that it was also influenced by other strong forces that were present in Syria during the second and early third centuries so as to strengthen the possibility of its Syrian provenance?

II. Asceticism and Marriage

Syrian asceticism has often been described as reaching its apex in the fourth and fifth centuries and as a movement that owed many of its ideas and inspiration to ascetic and monastic life found in Egypt. Brock claims, however, that these Syrian ascetics were actually the heirs of a "remarkable ascetic tradition that went back to the very beginnings of Christianity."¹¹⁸ As discussed in Chapter Four, Brock cites Luke's Beatitudes and the

¹¹⁷ Whether the *Protevangelium of James* is in fact an historical account of Mary's life is of secondary importance to the fact that it claims to be so as evidenced by the text's own use of the term *historia*. Cf. discussion on its genre in Chapter One.

¹¹⁸ Brock notes that many of the sources that credit Mar Awgen, a disciple of Pachomius, for introducing monasticism into Syria and Mesopotamia do not mention him in any sources earlier than the ninth century either in Syriac or Greek, which allows Brock to conclude that Syrian monks must have simply "forgot their genuinely native heritage under the influence of the immense prestige that Egyptian monasticism gained, through works like Palladius' *Paradise*"; Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973): 2–3. Robert Murray also suggests in his discussion of Marcion that it was his promotion of

parable of Lazarus and the rich man as two of the earliest contributors to the Syrian ascetic tradition since they promoted the idea that riches can hinder one's devotion to Christ. Brock argues that it is not surprising that Luke's passage would significantly impact the rigid view of marriage in Syria and notes that although such attitudes were common in many early Christian communities, Syria-Mesopotamia was an area where this rigorist attitude towards marriage was particularly prevalent, especially in the second century as evidenced by the teachings provided by the influential religious leadership in Syria, e.g., Marcion, Tatian, and Mani.¹¹⁹ A harsh attitude towards marriage can also be detected in the two pseudo-Clementine epistles *de Virginitate*, which survive only in Syriac and are from a similar geographical provenance.¹²⁰

The severe rigidity of Syrian asceticism is perhaps best demonstrated in the requirement of celibacy for baptism for some communities in the early Syrian church. Brock notes that while this practice only marginally survived in the fourth century, it was common practice in the third century for almost the entire area of the Syriac-speaking churches.¹²¹ Another important source for providing information on ascetic ideas in early Christian communities in Syria is the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, especially the Acts of Thomas. That this text in particular was extremely popular among Marcionites and Manichaeans¹²² reinforces its ascetic character since it too maintains a harsh view of marriage; namely, it prohibits baptized converts from marrying and understands marriage as a road block for salvation.¹²³ L.W. Barnard contends that an ascetic emphasis can be found in all the various Syrian *Thomas* cycles. The Gospel of Thomas, for instance, also stressed virtues like "childlikeness, singleness and simplicity, abstinence and world-renunciation."¹²⁴ What is clear from this quick sur-

severe asceticism that especially appealed to the Syrians and helped challenge the apostolic tradition of Christianity, since extreme sexual asceticism in particular was already well-known and accepted in Syrian paganism; *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2004), 11.

¹¹⁹ Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 6. See subsection "Virginity, Celibacy, and Asceticism in the Second and Third Centuries," in Chapter Four for further discussion.

¹²⁰ Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 7.

¹²¹ Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 7; Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy, A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (PETSE 1; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951); cf. Francis Crawford Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1904), esp. 118–54.

¹²² Albertus F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (2d ed.; SNT; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 20–21.

¹²³ Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 9.

¹²⁴ L.W. Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa During the First Two Centuries, A.D.," *VC* 22.3 (1968): 165. Interestingly, Barnard notes that the Gospel of Thomas, like so many other identified "Jewish-Christian" documents, exalts

vey of early Syrian Christian teachings is that asceticism was a widely accepted and encouraged practice in early Syrian churches.

But is this the kind of practice reflected in the *Protevangelium of James*? In terms of abstinence from sexual intercourse, drinking of wine, and eating of flesh, the portrayal of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* is aligned with the extreme form of asceticism being practiced in Syria as demonstrated by the restrictions placed on her diet and her interactions by her mother, as well as her self-disciplined attitude towards her sexual purity, i.e., maintaining her virginity. As discussed in Chapters Two to Four, Mary's participation in such activities is presented as a sign of her extreme purity and thus her direct connection to holiness. Even Mary's parents are shown to be extremely aware of their own state of purity because of their responsibility to their daughter. This vivid portrayal of Mary's purity and holiness very likely may represent the special kind of purity to which Brock, Barnard and Arthur Vööbus refer concerning the ascetic practices of the Syrians.

Undoubtedly, Mary's purity dominates the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* and the practices that are put into effect by her parents to keep her pure and holy reflect practices deemed ascetic, but undeniable and striking differences remain. First, Mary is married to Joseph in the narrative. Although the relationship between Mary and Joseph is clearly depicted as parental rather than conjugal, the text does not present marriage in any negative light and even promotes it. Mary's parents are, of course, married and childbirth is portrayed as positive and even as a reward for being pious and loyal to God. Second, the text focuses heavily on Mary's ritual purity, which is distinguished from moral purity and is aligned with biblical, especially Levitical ideas about this quality. Finally, the extreme ascetic practices observed by Mary are simply that – practiced solely by Mary. Although Mary's parents are portrayed as pious Jews, they are never described as participating in the same kinds of restrictions placed on their daughter, nor are any other characters in the text portrayed in this manner. Indeed, Mary's purity is described as so exceptional that replication of such acts in order to achieve the same level of purity would be impossible – it would be difficult, for instance, to find an angel to monitor one's eating habits or to be granted housing in the holy temple (*Prot. Jas.* 8:2). Such extraordinary events deliberately convey the precise purpose of the narrative – to show that Mary is, in fact, a unique child.

the position of James the Just or brother of Jesus. Whether the *Protevangelium of James* was indeed written by James as the text so claims (scholarly consensus is that he did not), what is significant is that the author wanted to associate his story with James, which strengthens the argument of a "Jewish-Christian" influence on this text.

Does the *Protevangelium of James*' positive portrayal of marriage then point away from Syria? Not necessarily. Robert Murray asserts that though most Syrian Christian teaching was, at its core, severely ascetical, marriage and marital intercourse were still deemed good and were upheld by most Syrian Christians.¹²⁵ especially when chastity in marriage was practiced.¹²⁶ Bardaisan, unlike Marcion and Tatian, did not advocate asceticism and is known for having a positive view of sex and marriage.¹²⁷ Given the strong evidence of the influence of Judaism in Syria, many Syrian Christians who still valued Jewish traditions and practices would have continued to understand marriage and the marriage-bed as pious and childbirth as blessed by God. As we will discuss further below, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (3rd c; Syria), for instance, strongly affirms the holiness of marriage¹²⁸ as do the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* (often termed "Jewish-Christian"),¹²⁹ which attest to a less negative attitude towards sex and marital relations as a whole.¹³⁰

Clearly then, Syrian Christianity in the first few centuries CE can be characterized by the struggle between highly ascetical ideas of chastity and traditional views of the sanctity and blessedness of marriage and childbirth. As the writings of Aphrahat¹³¹ and Ephrem¹³² discussed in Chapter

¹²⁵ Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 11–12.

¹²⁶ The Pseudo-Clementine in particular understood marriage, practiced in chastity, as an important form of religious expression. Notably, chastity in marriage is not celibacy in marriage; it considered proper sexual practices in accordance with the law, e.g., abstaining from intercourse with one's menstruant wife or with a wife who is still deemed impure because of her menstruation. Cornelia Horn argues that the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies in particular appeal to sexual chastity as a way to promote traditional family structures and the well-being of children. For instance, she cites PsClem. *Hom.* 19, which features Peter drawing a connection between improper sexual conduct and the health of one's child. See "The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and the Challenges of the Conversion of Families," *LD* 2 (2007): 9.

¹²⁷ Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 11; so too Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 132.

¹²⁸ E.g., Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac I and II* (Louvain: CSCO, 1979) [with English Trans.], 23–24.

¹²⁹ E.g., PsClem. *Hom.* 11.28–30 and 1.13–19 on marriage; PsClem. *Hom.* 19.21 and 20.4 on sexual desire as good since it is given by God.

¹³⁰ Significantly, the sanctity of marriage was adamantly defended by the Great Church both in the East and West. Although a bit later, the local council of Gangra in Cappadocia (ca. 340s) was also formed to forcefully oppose encratistic ascetics and to reinforce the positive view of marriage and sexuality held in early Syrian Christianity, at least by some; Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 12–13.

¹³¹ Aphrahat was a Syriac-speaking Persian Christian sage and is best known for his writings collectively called the *Demonstrations*. For Aphrahat's ideas and connection to Judaism, cf. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*; Neusner argues that the Judaism known to Aphrahat was that of an Adiabenian converted to Judaism, 212–32.

Four indicate, the struggle concerning how best to demonstrate one's closeness to God (i.e., asceticism vs. married life) continued to characterize early Syrian Christianity beyond the second century.

Of course, we must ask if our text shows any signs of awareness of the issues, conflicts, and concerns in Syria during this time period. We have already addressed the text's relationship with Judaism and concluded that a strong Jewish influence is apparent and that a "Jewish-Christian" origin for the text is a highly likely possibility. Additionally, the portrayal of Mary's extreme and almost excessive purity and the practices she engages in to ensure that purity exhibit definite parallels with the severe kind of asceticism being described in Syria, but so too can the positive presentation of marriage and theme of the blessedness of childbirth in the text be seen as a reflection of the arguments for family life. To continue building our case for the possibility of a Syrian provenance, we now turn specifically to the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a source with a clear Syrian provenance, in order to note parallels and shared interests with our text.

III. Menstrual Purity: The *Didascalia Apostolorum*

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (DA) was written in the early third century CE, some decades after the formation of the Mishnah, but approximately contemporary with the formation of the Tosefta.¹³³ As a product of Syrian Christianity,¹³⁴ its "Jewish-Christian" character or what Vööbus has called "its Semitic Christian Traditions",¹³⁵ has been extensively discussed by

¹³² Ephrem was born in Nisibis and is best known for his commentary on Tatian's *Diatessaron* and Syrian Hymns. Cf. English translation and commentary in Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). His *Hymns on the Nativity* are especially intriguing for our studies concerning Mary and women in Syrian Christianity below. On Syrian homilies and hymns, Harvey's study on women's prominent verbal role in Syrian homilies and hymns where Mary is given special attention is especially useful ("2000 NAPS Presidential Address: Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition," *JECS* 9.1 (2001): 105–31) and discussion below. See also Kristi Upson-Saia's work in Syrian Dialogue hymns for descriptions of the genre and its unique function as biblical interpretation in Syria; "Caught in a Compromising Position: The Biblical Exegesis and Characterization of Biblical Protagonists in the Syriac Dialogue Hymns," *Hugoye* 9.2 (2006): 1–27. For an English translation of the homilies, see Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1989).

¹³³ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 166 n. 18 and references and notes therein.

¹³⁴ For a discussion on the dating of the DA, Vööbus provides a good overview in the introduction to his translation of the Syriac edition; *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 1–23.

¹³⁵ Vööbus, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 5.

scholars.¹³⁶ Although the work is pseudonymous, Quasten suggests that the work was most likely written by a Christian authority (such as a bishop) who had converted from Judaism.¹³⁷ Although the text in its entirety is addressed to readers in varying stages of life (e.g., married persons, widows and deacons) and deals with a range of subject matter (e.g., duties of a bishop, penance, liturgical worship, etc.), this text displays a special interest in reinforcing the problem with Christ-believers who continue to regard the Jewish laws (including menstrual separation) as still binding and Torah-observance as valid.¹³⁸

Much like the conflicts attested in Acts and Galatians among “Jewish-Christians” over the value of continuing Jewish practices for those who already “turned to God,” the DA, too, provides important information about Jewish, “Jewish-Christian,” and Gentile-Christian relations, but this time the discussion is set in the early third century. In fact the DA’s literary framework is based on the Apostolic Council and the conflict evident in Acts 15¹³⁹ (Vööbus, 7–8).¹⁴⁰ This literary framework is, of course, interesting since the events that transpire in the NT literature also occur in Syria. Like Acts 15, the DA explains that the twelve apostles assembled in Jerusalem in order to discuss what was to be done with various communities who continued to observe holiness, dietary restrictions, and other unspecified biblical regulations and observances of practices based on biblical legislation (Vööbus, 14).¹⁴¹ Given that the DA is not simply another account of the Acts 15 events, but rather a description of the conflicts within its own community, not surprisingly there are changes and additions reflective of its contemporary concerns; thus whereas circumcision and dietary prac-

¹³⁶ Fonrobert notes that “Jewish Christianity” is usually studied as Christian texts and therefore as a witness to the diversity of Christian identities. In her study of the “Jewish-Christian” character of the DA, she proposes the validity of looking at this text as a witness to the diversity of Jewish identities as well; “The *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Mishnah for the Disciple of Jesus,” *JECS* 9 (2001): 483–509.

¹³⁷ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Ante-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus*, vol. 2 (Allen, Tex.: Christian Classics, 1995), 147–48. See also F.L. Cross, “*Didascalia Apostolorum*,” *ODCC* 397–98.

¹³⁸ Cross, “*Didascalia Apostolorum*,” 397–98.

¹³⁹ Fonrobert notes that the DA relies exclusively on Acts 15 and ignores Paul’s account in Gal 2 for its retelling of the events surrounding the Apostolic Council (parts of the conflict are, of course, mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2). On the pseudopigraphic function of the title of DA and the strategy of retelling the Apostolic Council to gain authority for its own work, see Fonrobert, “*Didascalia Apostolorum*,” 489–90; *eadem Menstrual Purity*, 170–72.

¹⁴⁰ Text citations are based on Vööbus’ edition in CSCO; both Syriac and English translations have been consulted, but the citation will reflect the English translation only. Note that the citations in the body reflect page numbers, not chapter numbers.

¹⁴¹ Fonrobert, “*Didascalia Apostolorum*,” 490.

tices were at the center of the conflict in NT literature of the first century, the DA’s more prominent discussion on menstrual separation and the keeping of Shabbat reflects its own contemporary situation (Vööbus, 216).

Although the DA confirms the continuance of a number of Jewish observances still practiced by this community, the DA’s concern for menstrual separation offers the most promising evidence for suggesting a Syrian milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*. The DA attests to a group of women who are identified as having recently converted from Judaism to “believe in God our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Vööbus, 223), but who nevertheless continue to practice menstrual separation despite being encouraged by a Christian authority to forsake their old observances.¹⁴² Only through the arguments put forth by the author of the DA do we learn of the conflict, namely that the choice to observe menstrual separation assumes identification with and a return to Jewish customs over and above the new traditions of Christianity.

Undoubtedly, menstrual separation has its roots in biblical law¹⁴³ and is connected to the purity rules related to the Jerusalem Temple, but in his study of the menstruant and her access to the sacred, Cohen argues that “Christianity excluded menstruants from the church long before Judaism excluded them from the synagogue.”¹⁴⁴ Building his case on the problematic assumption that the rabbis were the dominant religious and social force within Jewish society post-70, Cohen utilizes the Mishnah and the Talmudim to argue for the synagogue’s lack of inherent sanctity. Cohen suggests that since the purity requirements associated with the temple after its destruction simply were not transferred to the sacred activities of studying Torah, reciting liturgical benedictions, or public or private prayer,¹⁴⁵ the purity rules required to enter the temple did not apply to the synagogue since even lepers were allowed in (*m. Neg* 13.12; *t. Neg* 7.11).¹⁴⁶ In this

¹⁴² The phrase used for menstruation is *זָבֵבָה נִזְבְּבָה* (literally “seven days of your flux” (Vööbus, 256).

¹⁴³ See Chapter Three on these laws.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 287.

¹⁴⁵ E.g., *m. Ber* 3.4–6 places restrictions on the ejaculant concerning reciting aloud the benedictions of the liturgy after meals, but nowhere restricts the *zab*, the menstruant, or any other impure person.

¹⁴⁶ In fact, Cohen argues that the earliest Jewish text (post-70 CE) that prohibits menstruants from coming into contact with the sacred is the sixth or seventh century text *Beraita de Nidda*. The *Beraita de Nidda* explicitly prohibits menstruants from entering the synagogue and touching holy books and implies that they are banned from reciting benedictions and reciting the name of God. Parturients are also banned from entering synagogues or schools. Only in this document is recorded a striking change in the status of not only the menstruant, but also the *sancta*; Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 284–

way, even menstruants, according to Cohen, would have had access to the synagogue.

By contrast, scholars like Runesson,¹⁴⁷ Donald Binder,¹⁴⁸ Lee I. Levine,¹⁴⁹ Steven Fine,¹⁵⁰ Jonathan D. Lawrence,¹⁵¹ and Susan Haber¹⁵² argue against Cohen's assessment of the holiness of the synagogue and instead make a case for the sanctity of the synagogue in the Diaspora and even its possible holiness in the land of Israel as early as the first century.¹⁵³ Specifically, water facilities such as mikvaot, cisterns, and basins constructed adjacent to synagogues raise questions concerning its holiness.¹⁵⁴ Utilizing archaeological and epigraphical evidence, Runesson and Haber in particular, interpret the water basins found inside the assembly halls at Jericho and Gamla as requiring ritual hand-washing after the handling of Torah Scrolls and the presence of water facilities adjacent to the synagogues for the purpose of ritual washing. For the synagogues located in the Diaspora (e.g., Delos and Ostia)¹⁵⁵ the connection between purity, holiness, and the synagogue are more strongly reinforced not only by the presence of a cis-

85; but see also Chaim Horowitz, ed. "Beraita de Nidda," in *Tosfata Atiqata*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main, 1890), 26 on menstruants; 31–33 on parturients.

¹⁴⁷ See e.g., Runesson, "Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual bath in the Diaspora Synagogue," in *The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies* (ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and Olof Brandt; *ActaRom* 40 57; Stockholm: Paul Åströms, 2001), 115–26.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., Donald Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (SBLDS 169; Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 200 on synagogues in Palestine; 336–37 on synagogues in the Diaspora.

¹⁴⁹ Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2d ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), e.g., 108–9 on the use of *proseuche* in Delos.

¹⁵⁰ E.g., Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). See also *idem*, "From Meeting House to Sacred Realm: Holiness and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (ed. Steven Fine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27–49.

¹⁵¹ Jonathan D. Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006).

¹⁵² Susan Haber, "Common Judaism, Common Synagogue? Purity, Holiness, and Sacred Space at the Turn of the Common Era," in "They Shall Purify Themselves": Essays on Purity in Early Judaism (ed. Adele Reinhartz; SBLÉJL 24; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 161–79.

¹⁵³ The archaeological and inscriptional evidence is clearer in the Diaspora than for Israel. Levine suggests that this is the case for the Diaspora, but remains unconvinced for the sanctity of the synagogue for the land of Israel. See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 74–78.

¹⁵⁴ Namely, does close proximity to water facilities suggest a connection between purity practices and synagogues or do they simply reflect the regular use of purification facilities by Jews who also attended synagogue regularly?

¹⁵⁵ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 115–29, esp. 126–28.

tern, water basin, or fountain near the entrance of the synagogue, which was most likely used by Jews to wash before entering, but also terminology used in inscriptions (i.e., *proseuchel* προσευχή) that identified Jewish institutions as having "temple-status."¹⁵⁶

While Cohen's assessment concerning the sanctity of the synagogue is problematic, he is correct in his assertion that Jewish ideas (Levitical and possibly proto-rabbinic) concerning purity taught early Christians that menstruants were impure.¹⁵⁷ The practice of separating menstruants from the sacred was followed very early on by some strands of Christians, especially those groups that saw their rituals, institutions, and clergy as permanently replacing the Jerusalem temple, its cult, and priests. Along with the Roman Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus and the Alexandrian *Letter of Dionysius*, the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum* offers some of the earliest evidence for Christian references to the separation of menstruants from the sancta.¹⁵⁸ But what makes the DA so utterly unique from the Roman, Alexandrian, and all other witnesses to the practice of menstrual separation in pre-modern history is that it is, as Charlotte E. Fonrobert puts it, "the only document in pre-modern history of Judaism and Christianity in which we find women developing an argument for why they wish to practice menstrual separation."¹⁵⁹ In other words, the argument for menstrual separation and the interest in the practice of keeping such observances specifically made by women is a concern unique to the DA; thus until we unearth another document of its kind with clear origins to another locale, this concern can be linked directly to Syria.

While the DA is the earliest document in Syria to show an interest in menstrual purity laws for its Christian community, it is certainly not the only one. The Syrian Pseudo-Clementine Homilies in particular place great emphasis on "keeping oneself pure" as a proper way to worship God. Specifically, Peter instructs that men should not have intercourse with their wives when they are menstruating and to avoid sexual relations with women who have been rendered impure by their menstruation in accordance with the laws of God's commands (Ps. Clem. Hom. 11.28.1). He also insists that washing one's body is necessary since "to keep one's self pure is truly worth aspiring after not because purity of the body preceded purity of the heart, but because purity follows goodness" (Ps. Clem. Hom. 11.28.2–3). Although the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies date to the fourth century, they show that the interest in menstrual purity laws held particular appeal for Christian communities in Syria.

¹⁵⁶ Haber, "Common Judaism, Common Synagogue?," 175.

¹⁵⁷ Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred," 287.

¹⁵⁸ Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred," 287–90.

¹⁵⁹ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 168.

The arguments for maintaining menstrual separation offered by the women in the DA merit further analysis since this practice also appears in the *Protevangelium of James* and is, like the DA, presented in a positive light by those who wish to practice it. My attempt to understand the practice of menstrual separation held by the women in the DA is informed by Fonrobert's extensive study on menstrual purity in Jewish and Christian literature. The DA's discussion of menstrual separation by the women of this community can be divided into two parts: information about what such separation entails (Vööbus, 329) and the arguments used by the women for why these practices should be kept (Vööbus, 238–239; 241–42).¹⁶⁰ The text specifies that for "seven days of their menstrual period" (Vööbus, 238) the women of this community refrained from prayer, study (of Scripture) and participation in the Eucharist, and that the women themselves chose to separate themselves from these activities that were central to the religious life of the Christian organization (Vööbus, 238). The women present two distinct arguments in support of such separation, one based on the relationship between women's bodies and the Holy Spirit (Vööbus, 238–239), and the other based on the validity of scriptural legislation that deems their bodies to be in a state of impurity (Vööbus, 241–242).¹⁶¹

The first argument centers on what Fonrobert calls "uterine pneumatology."¹⁶² Fonrobert argues that although the DA women's seven-day period of menstrual separation connects their practice to biblical legislation (i.e., Lev 15), the argument itself is based on pneumatological reasoning. According to the DA author, the women believe that during the period of those seven days, they are void of the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot participate in the three central works of the Holy Spirit (i.e., prayer, study, and Eucharist) (Vööbus, 238). Although the DA argues with the women that the Holy Spirit is always in them because of their baptism which granted them right of entry into the discipleship of Christ and gave them affiliation with God (Vööbus, 239–42), the women's understanding of the Holy Spirit is that it is subject to the cyclical habits of their physical bodies.¹⁶³

Although the DA author's refutation of the women's argument is illogical and inconsistent, his conclusions are interesting: he argues that since the women believe that the Holy Spirit leaves during their menstruation,

¹⁶⁰ Fonrobert rightly notes that we may also learn of the arguments put forth by the women for menstrual separation, but that we should do so with caution since it is impossible to know for certain whether these women really made these arguments or if the arguments extracted from the DA author's writings are simply constructed to express the author's own theological interests; *Menstrual Purity*, 174.

¹⁶¹ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 174–85.

¹⁶² Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 205.

¹⁶³ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 174–79.

such thoughts allow the spirit of impurity to enter (Vööbus, 239–242).¹⁶⁴ In other words, the concern here seems to be with spiritual impurity, which often denotes an unclean spirit or demon given that a clean spirit is associated with the Holy Spirit. The DA author's assessment is interesting in light of the Pseudo-Clementine's understanding of "unclean spirits" and demons, which also references ideas concerning "unclean spirits," but in order to argue exactly the opposite view held by the DA author on the need for ritual purity. For instance, Annette Y. Reed notes that Peter connects the practice of ritual impurity such as improper worship (e.g., Ps. Clem. *Hom.* 9.2–7) with demonic control in his explanation to non-believing Gentiles concerning why they experience suffering and disease.¹⁶⁵ In order to be free from enslavement by demons, Peter argues that by taking up baptism (which involves regular ritual ablutions, both for the remission of sins and for the purification of the body; Ps. Clem. *Hom* 11.26–30) and abandoning idols, Gentiles can be more like Jews since demons "do not appear to the Jews" and even cower before them because of their superior way of worshipping.¹⁶⁶ In other words, freedom from demonic control involves participating in acts of ritual purification and by being in a state of ritual purity. Perhaps this connection between the "unclean spirit" and "ritual impurity" is what the DA women had in mind when arguing their case for menstrual separation based on the belief that they were "void of the holy spirit" during this time (Vööbus, 241).

The second argument put forth by the women is that their reading and adherence to the biblical legislation of Lev 15 compels them to continue practicing menstrual separation (Vööbus, 241–42).¹⁶⁷ According to this argument (Vööbus, 241–42), the women believe that during the time of their menstruation, they are in a state of impurity since Lev 15 is explicit about placing them into this category and provides them with the requirements needed to return to a state of purity, e.g., she must wait seven days to achieve cleanliness, regardless of how many days she actually bleeds. Fonrobert suggests that the women's argument based on biblical legislation was supported by the fact that they were previously Jewish women who converted and that in their conversion to Christianity the Scripture still maintained a fundamental role in their new faith, a circumstance probably particularly true for the DA community.¹⁶⁸ If we accept this argument,

¹⁶⁴ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 178–79.

¹⁶⁵ Reed, "'Jewish Christianity' after the 'Parting of the Ways': Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementine," 218 in her *Ways that Never Parted* volume.

¹⁶⁶ Reed, "Historiography and Self-Definition," 219.

¹⁶⁷ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 179–85.

¹⁶⁸ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 180.

then the fundamental issue here again is impurity, but this time it is concrete and based on concepts and texts that are inherently priestly where the critical concern is being able to distinguish between the pure and impure and determining when one can and cannot enter into sacred spaces or participate in sacred activities as outlined, for instance, in Leviticus.

A similar interest in menstrual separation and purity also appears in the *Protevangelium of James*. Specifically, the DA women's second argument exhibits the closest correspondence to ideas in our text. In Chapter Three, our investigation identified menstrual impurity as the most likely cause for Mary's departure from the Temple precinct and showed how her leaving, initiated by the Temple priests, but recognized and agreed to by Mary, reinforced her characterization as a pure and pious Jew. Mary's practice of menstrual separation reveals the narrative's concern for biblical legislation and acknowledgement of the laws regarding ritual purity as valid. The text's concern for one's state of purity does not start and end with Mary's removal from the Temple, but begins with the first lines of the story and remains the constant theme throughout the entire narrative. Ritual purity dominates the first half of the *Protevangelium of James*, especially in terms of interactions the characters have with the Temple and its sacrificial cult. In other words, Mary and her parents are depicted as acutely aware of their ritual state at all times, including, of course, Mary's menstrual purity. This awareness is demonstrated by their ability to distinguish between the pure and impure and the holy and common, but also by their knowledge of and participation in the required ritual practices necessary to move between these four states.¹⁷⁰

Recognizing why the DA women believe that menstrual separation should be practiced, we might fruitfully examine what it is about the practice that so upsets the DA author that he becomes, as Fonrobert puts it, somewhat abusive in his rejection of the women's observances connected to menstrual separation.¹⁷¹ These rites include refraining from certain activities associated with the sacred, but also the practice of ritual immersion to mark the end of a separation period. As discussed above, the women's arguments center around issues concerning purity and impurity. This concern for purity then may shed light on precisely why the DA author reacts so harshly towards the women. Since the DA considers baptism to be the only form of purification for Christians, Fonrobert proposes that the DA interprets the ritual immersion practiced at the end of the menstrual period

¹⁷⁰ For a full discussion of the four categories stated above (pure, impure, holy, common) according to Leviticus, see Jacob Milgrom's chart in his important study, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 616.

¹⁷¹ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 166.

as a "ritual to baptism and not merely as a possible supplemental ritual."¹⁷² Thus, the issue here is not simply about whether the women are pure or impure, but who (i.e., the Christian DA author or the women, influenced by their Jewish customs) has the authority to determine when one is in a state of purity or impurity.

In her concluding remarks, Fonrobert imagines two possible scenarios for how these women of the DA came to practice menstrual separation. In the first scenario, the women simply continued what they practiced before entering the Christian community, abstaining from sacred activities when in a state of menstrual impurity, but now applying this belief to the church and its central activities. In this case, these women probably came to the DA community from a Jewish community that "was not yet" regulated by "orthodox halakhah" since the rabbis in the Tosefta knew no permission for menstruating women to study.¹⁷³ The second scenario imagines the women of the DA practicing menstrual separation only after joining the DA community because they understood the church and the Eucharist as a substitute for the Temple and its sacrificial cult whereas this was not the case for their view of the synagogue.¹⁷⁴

Although I am in agreement with Fonrobert that the second option is less likely, both scenarios reinforce the idea that menstrual separation continued to be valid for the women of the DA and a problem for the DA author because they understood it to be important to their religious identity as Christians. Importantly, Fonrobert also reminds us that although the controversy in the DA has almost exclusively been treated as an issue between "Jewish-Christians" and Gentile Christianity, the women in the DA clearly understand themselves to be Christians, not a "separate syncretistic group of Jewish Christians."¹⁷⁵ This Christian identity, of course, also applies to the DA author as evident in his choice to address these women as baptizé members of the community. The conflict arises, then, precisely because both the women and the DA author hold different understandings of what it means to live a Christian life. Indeed Fonrobert is correct in her assessment that the issue at the heart of the menstrual separation conflicts described in the DA is one of identity formation – by choosing to continue menstrual separation in the context of Christianity, the women of the DA

¹⁷² Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 181; cf. e.g., the promotion of ritual ablation as multiple baptisms in Ps. Clem. Hom. 11.26–30 and discussion above. Cf. Cohen's discussion of the sanctity of the synagogue after the destruction of the Temple: "Menstruants and the Sacred," 281–87 and discussion above.

¹⁷³ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 204. Fonrobert cites specifically 1. Bar 2.13 on p. 173 as evidence that rabbis in the Tosefta allowed women who menstruate to study.

¹⁷⁴ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 205.

¹⁷⁵ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 207.

unconsciously attempted to contribute to the formation of the Christian identity of the community, to the evident dismay of the DA author.

It is impossible to state definitively whether the *Protevangelium of James*' inclusion of Mary's observance of menstrual separation in the narrative reflects the same concerns for scriptural interpretation and identity formation as expressed in the DA. However, what can be determined with certainty is that Mary's ability to menstruate and her participation in menstrual separation (i.e., Mary leaves the sacred precinct of the Temple) are consistent with the goals of the *Protevangelium of James* and are presented, much like in the DA, as a positive action by those who wish to practice it. Mary's ability to menstruate reveals her potential role as the mother of the messiah while her participation in Levitical laws concerning menstruants reinforces her characterization as pure and holy. Although the *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of general customs and traditions as well as practices such as menstrual separation and Temple and sacrifice activities are described in the context of "Judaism," the text presents these ideas as consistent with views concerning Mary as the mother of the messiah and Jesus' role as Saviour and Christ. Given the strong parallels that can be drawn between our text and the DA, especially based on their shared interest in practices deemed Jewish (menstrual separation in particular), I suggest that until other evidence comes to light or another text showing the same interest in menstrual purity as expressed in the DA is unearthed, the *Protevangelium of James*' shared concerns with this text is another strong arrow that points to the possibility of a Syrian milieu. As a final stop, we will now turn to the views held on Mary and women in Syrian Christianity in order to provide some concluding observations in support for our case of a Syrian provenance.

IV. Mary and Women in Syrian Christianity

Syrian devotion for Mary probably flourished primarily in the fourth century due to the massive contributions of Ephrem.¹⁷⁵ In his *Hymns on the Nativity*, Ephrem devotes a substantial amount of space to Mary's voice, thought, and unique character.¹⁷⁶ Mary sings praise to God for his mighty works and for choosing her to conceive and give birth to Him (*Hymn. Nat. 2.7; Hymn. Nat. 5.19–20; Hymn. Nat. 15*); she sings songs to her son about

¹⁷⁵ Ephrem's homilies and poems also explored feminine imagery, the role of women, and female metaphors to describe the deity. He is also well-known for his writings and thoughts on asceticism, virginity, and sexuality. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 1–3; ideam, "Ephrem The Syrian's Use of Female Metaphors to Describe the Deity," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 5.2 (2001): 261–88.

¹⁷⁶ Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choir and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity," *Hugoye* 8.2 (2005): 2–3.

his role in salvation history (*Hymn. Nat. 1–4; Hymn. Nat. 8.3, 7; Hymn. Nat. 16*); she sings about the cosmic role of Christ and her role as the new Eve (*Hymn. Nat. 17*); she sings about the historical link between Isaiah's prophesy of the birth of Emmanuel and her son (*Hymn. Nat. 19*); she even sings about being tired of singing and prays that He "Permit your mother to be silent about you, for her mouth is weary" (*Hymn. Nat. 19.18–19*).¹⁷⁷ Clearly, under Ephrem, Marian devotion was significantly developed and more sophisticated than its contemporary Western counterpart. Susan Ashbrook Harvey argues that it was not until the fifth century under Cyril of Alexandria (most likely) that we have a comparable expression of Marian devotion in Greek orthodox churches and that we would have to wait centuries after that for Catholicism in the Latin west to express similar interest.¹⁷⁸ Although Harvey credits Ephrem for celebrating Mary's invaluable and inseparable role in Christ's work¹⁷⁹ and for her massive veneration and following in Syria, she also argues that "he could hardly have introduced her cult in such profound proportions to the Syrian church – it had to be there already."¹⁸⁰

As discussed briefly above, the second century Syrian Ode 19 is an important document for Marian ideologies in Syria and may in fact testify to the significant following of Mary before the time of Ephrem. In it, Mary, as Harvey puts it "is hailed in concise and dazzling terms."¹⁸¹ She is described as the "virgin mother with great compassion... who bore... and felt no pains/grief" and who "did not require a midwife," and "she loved by/in [his] salvation, and guarded by/in [his] kindness, and made known by/in [his] greatness."¹⁸² Harvey argues that the themes offered by Ode 19 along with Ephrem's Marian hymns "may add weight to the theory that the *Protevangelium of James* ... is the work of Syrian origins"¹⁸³ since it is the single most important and influential document on the Virgin Mary in the second or early third century.

Another feature that is characteristically Syrian Christian is the practice of integrating asceticism and family devotion. Harvey argues in her study of mothers and daughters in early Syrian hagiography that family bonds

¹⁷⁷ Text citations are based on McVey's edition cited above.

¹⁷⁸ Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291. See also Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (2d ed.; Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 1999).

¹⁷⁹ Harvey argues that Ephrem's portrayal of Mary as indispensable to her son's redemptive role (she too is presented in the Eucharist since the body of Christ received in the Eucharist is the one he was given by Mary) has contributed much to her veneration among the Syrian people; "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291.

¹⁸⁰ Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291.

¹⁸¹ Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 290.

¹⁸² Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 268.

¹⁸³ Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291.

could be sustained in an ascetic context and that the joining of familial and ascetic bonds were distinctive features of Syrian Christianity.¹⁸⁴ Although Harvey's hagiographical literature dates a good deal later than our text (fifth and sixth century), we see these practices of "chastity in marriage" in other Syrian documents like the Pseudo-Clementine, where family life and chastity are extremely important expressions of religious life in Syrian Christianity.¹⁸⁵ This unique feature of Syrian Christianity may perhaps explain why the *Protevangelium of James* gained so much popularity in the Syrian Orient. We see evidence of this popularity in that the earliest veneration and significant following of Mary took place in the Syrian Orient, the text itself was extremely well-received among Syrian Christian communities, the earliest translation of the text was in Syriac,¹⁸⁶ and the abiding popularity it received in Syria is well attested.¹⁸⁷ Doubtless, the *Protevangelium of James*' portrayal of Mary's extreme practices to ensure the maintenance of her purity alongside the text's presentation of the importance of family life, devotion, and obligation must have appealed to the ascetic and familial proclivities of Syrian Christianity.

V. Final Thoughts on a Syrian Provenance

In our case for suggesting Syria as the most likely milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*, we first looked to the continued influence of Judaism on Antiochene Christianity and suggested that its likely "Jewish-Christian" origins seem to be reflected in our text's concerns for maintaining Jewish customs and laws especially surrounding issues of purity. Various sources from Syria further demonstrate a shared interest between our text and the writings characteristic of Syrian Christianity, including a concern for docetism and anti-Marcionite rhetoric, Syrian ideas concerning asceticism and marriage, and even Syrian views on Mary specifically as well as women in general. I suggest that the *Protevangelium of James* in its portrayal of Mary's physical birth and very fleshly body as well as her presentation as Virgin Mother might safely be interpreted as anti-docetic and anti-Marcionite responses and as a commentary on both practices of virginity and motherhood as legitimate forms of religious expression, respectively,

¹⁸⁴ Harvey, "Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography," *JECS* 4.1 (1996): 27–56. On the role of the "daughters of the Covenant," see also *eadem*, "Revisiting the Daughters," 1–28.

¹⁸⁵ Horn, "Challenges of the Conversion of Families," 1–35.

¹⁸⁶ That Syrian culture was thoroughly bilingual and our text's earliest translation is in Syriac may serve as supplementary evidence for our case for a Syrian milieu. For more on this, see n. 78 above.

¹⁸⁷ Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291.

and thus as important arrows pointing to the possibility of a Syrian provenance.

Additionally, Marian devotion, veneration, and popularity in Syria is second to none and other witnesses to Mary's *virginitas in partu* and *postpartum* such as Ode 19 the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and Ignatius' *To the Ephesians* 19.1 continue to strengthen the likelihood of a Syrian provenance. Most importantly, the Syrian documents *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the Pseudo-Clementines *Homilies* indicate that the *Protevangelium of James* shared with these texts an interest in menstrual purity laws and in the case of the former source, a unique perspective on the practice of menstrual separation.

Admittedly, each characteristic of Syrian Christianity discussed in this chapter alone may not be persuasive of a Syrian provenance. Egypt, too, served as a hub for ascetic practices and anti-docetic rhetoric, and virginity remains a praised virtue in numerous communities that span various geographical locations. Additionally, the practice of menstrual separation in and of itself is not a unique concern to Syria. As discussed above, the Letter of Dionysius from Alexandria also attests to the incompatibility of menstrual blood with the sacred. For just these reasons Egypt still stands a contender for the *Protevangelium of James*' provenance. But what makes Syria a more probable locale over and above any other scholarly suggested milieu, including Egypt, is that in addition to the characteristics listed above, which both share, Syria demonstrates a unique history for the earliest veneration of Mary and is home to two important texts that share a deep concern for ritual purity (*Didascalia Apostolorum* and Pseudo-Clementines *Homilies*); both issues are reflected meaningfully in our text. Indeed the DA is the only extant text where we find an argument made for the validity of menstrual separation and the desire to continue this practice by the women themselves. Additionally, Syriac remains the next earliest extant manuscript of our narrative. My hope is that while each individual characteristic discussed thus far may encourage scholars to entertain the possibility of a Syrian provenance, the summation of these characteristics form the most convincing argument for a Syrian milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*.

Conclusion

A. Mary's Purity and Characterization

My point of departure for reading the *Protevangelium of James* has been to pay attention to its narrative design with the aims of shedding light on the text's characterization of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and of contributing to scholarly discussions about the work's provenance. In Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I focused on Mary's ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity. Examining the literary devices and common literary tools used to flesh out the characterization of Mary and her parents in the *Protevangelium of James*, I argued that narrative details concerning her purity play a significant role in the portrayal of Mary herself. Chapter Five returned to questions about the text's date and provenance; there, I suggested that its narrative and ritual concerns are most fitting with a late second or early third century date and a West Syrian cultural context. By means of conclusion, I would like to return to the theme of purity, highlighting what I consider to be my main findings and offering some final insights on the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*.

As noted above, this study has been informed by the approaches to literary characterization in the works of Beverly R. Gaventa and Mary F. Foskett, and has thus asked "how the character of Mary emerges from a narrative text to reside in the imagination of a reader."¹ By working inductively and paying close attention to the text's depiction of Mary and the other characters' choices, speeches, and descriptions as well as their motives, attitudes, and moral nature, we analyzed the textual clues – what Foskett terms "character indicators" – to assess the whole character of Mary.² So what can we conclude about Mary's portrayal in the *Protevangelium of James*?

¹ Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 4 and Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 23.

² Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 5–6.

As we have seen, Mary is here characterized primarily by her purity. This quality dominates every plot, action, discourse, and setting of the *Protevangelium of James*' narrative world. Although Mary is the protagonist, she speaks so seldom that much of her characterization is conveyed by words attributed to other characters and to the third-person narrator's descriptions. While the narrator provides the most substantial details concerning Mary as pure, figural representations of Mary (i.e., those offered by other characters) are often embedded within the narrator's descriptions to reinforce and heighten her depiction. For instance, in the description of Mary's infancy years at *Prot. Jas.* 6:1–4, the narrator describes Anna as preventing Mary from making contact with the profane or unclean. Anna is then depicted as declaring that Mary "will never walk on this ground again until I take you into the Temple of the Lord," thereby reinforcing the narrator's portrayal of the exceptionally pure child.

For the majority of the narrative, Mary's portrayal is achieved explicitly by means of verbal statements providing descriptions, traits, and properties for her character. For instance, at *Prot. Jas.* 10:4, Mary is explicitly said to be "undefiled before God" by the narrator.³ Particularly significant in this instance is the decision to exclude a block characterization for Mary or a general statement about her in order to introduce her. The reader is never given a description of Mary's physical appearance nor of the way she is dressed.

In her comparative study of ancient Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian narratives that feature virgin protagonists, Foskett notes the common interest in the physical body and beauty of the *parthenos* (e.g., Chloe of *Daphnis and Chloe*, Leucippe of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Aseneth of *Joseph and Aseneth*, and Thecla of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*) and their association with erotic power.⁴ Foskett argues that this connection between the *parthenos*, the beautiful, and control of erotic power often leaves the *parthenos* vulnerable to violation and male possession.⁵ In this context, the omission of any reference to Mary's physical beauty or her sexual desirability in the *Protevangelium of James* is unusual and perhaps unique. In its presentation of Mary as exceptionally pure, no room is left to interpret Mary's sexual status as anything but a sign of her complete purity and holiness.

Setting, however, takes on even more importance in establishing and contributing to Mary's characterization in the *Protevangelium of James*. The accounts of Mary's move from her home sanctuary to the sacred Temple and finally to the protected walls of Joseph's home serve repeatedly to

³ See Chapter Four for a discussion on this phrase.

⁴ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 82–84, e.g., in the case of Leucippe and Clitophon.

⁵ See Chapter Four for a discussion on this point.

remind the reader that her purity is always safeguarded even if such protection is not always needed (e.g., when Mary is made the Lord's Virgin she is no longer requires any physical protection). As argued in Chapter Four, Mary's literary environments reinforce and replicate the nature of Mary's purity.

That Mary is often positioned and moved by other characters (e.g., escorted into the Temple by her parents, escorted out of the Temple by the priests, etc.) in contrast to moving by her own volition into different settings and scenarios allows us to view Mary as a flat character for a considerable portion of the narrative. The presence of a flat protagonist seems counterintuitive, but given that Mary speaks only on five occasions throughout the entire text, such a conclusion may be warranted. I suggest, however, that this narrative structure is deliberate and significant. The contrast between when Mary is being described by the narrator and the other characters and when she self-characterizes via her five spoken statements is striking and serves to heighten the importance when she does speak. In her own voice, Mary is shown to be a thoughtful individual who displays remarkable traits of loyalty and faithfulness (to God), courage (to stand up to accusations made against her sexual status), and even strength (to declare her innocence unwaveringly). When Mary speaks in her own voice, she transforms from a flat to a round character and exposes the complexity of her character as she becomes a more forceful example for, in particular, women who maintain their innocence and purity even when questioned by the highest male authorities.⁶

In addition to exploring *how* Mary is portrayed in the *Protevangelium of James*, we must return to the question concerning *what* she is here characterized as being. Although Mary is often described as the Virgin of the

⁶ The traditional view held for characters of ancient literature has primarily been, in the words of literary scholars Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, 'flat,' 'static,' and quite 'opaque' (*The Nature of Narrative* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966], 164). Scholars such as David Gowler, Fred Burnett, and Robert Alter show, however, the complexity of biblical characters and the possibility for even type-characters to have moments of roundness during the reading process; Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (ESEC; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 173-74; Burnett, "Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 1-28; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Additionally, Gaventa writes that "the character becomes known to the reader in a variety of ways, primary among which are the choices made by the character." Quoting Aristotle, Gaventa argues that the most significant and "basic thing that a character must do is to be seen to make a choice." In Mary's five powerful speeches, she declares herself to be innocent and self-characterizes herself as pure, thus demonstrating the range of complexity in her character; *Mary*, 21. The relevant passages in Aristotle are 2.1.11 and 2.1.9-13 in *The Eudemian Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 240-42, 304-7.

Lord and as a *parthenos*, this study has shown that it is inadequate to conclude that the *Protevangelium of James* renders Mary simply by her sexual status. Gaventa argues that even the term "purity" itself may be misleading and does not provide an accurate and complete sense of the text's portrayal of Mary.⁷ Instead, Gaventa adopts the phrase "sacred purity" to refer to the way the *Protevangelium of James* personifies Mary, based on Peter Brown's description of her as a "human creature totally enclosed in sacred space."⁸ In my view, Gaventa's use of "sacred purity" or even "holy purity" accurately describes the kind of purity that envelops Mary throughout the text. The terms "sacred" and "purity" describe both her character and function in that Mary's extreme purity sets her aside for God and thus makes her holy.

Throughout this study, I have argued that it is not sufficient to understand the depiction of Mary's purity in the *Protevangelium of James* solely in terms of her virginity. The text's characterization of Mary as pure involves not only her sexual purity and therefore her moral purity, but also a concern for her ritual, menstrual, and even genealogical purity. In Chapter Two, I attempted to show how the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary's ritual purity in terms of an overarching interest in the Temple and practice of sacrifice, by providing a literary setting and framing a storyline that revolves around the ritual practices of Anna and Joachim and their deep concern to prevent their daughter from contracting the ritual impurities of everyday life. In this way, Mary and her parents are characterized both by their understanding of biblical ideas about ritual impurity and by their interaction with the Temple and its priests. In Chapter Three, I further argued that the text's reference to potential menstrual impurity serves as a narrative pivot, while simultaneously providing a new dimension to Mary's character. The allusion to Mary's possible menarche triggers her transition from childhood into adulthood and signals her potential status as a mother, thus reminding the reader of the importance of her humanity and opening the way for motherhood to be praised alongside ascetic virginity.

In our tripartite discussion of Mary's purity, our fourth chapter explored Mary's sexual status as a *parthenos* and designated role as the "Virgin of the Lord," but also her genealogical purity as evident by the emphasis on Mary's Davidic lineage. No longer characterized exclusively by her associations with the Temple and its priests and described in terms likened to a Temple sacrifice, Mary transitions into becoming a symbolic Temple her-

⁷ Gaventa argues that the term purity is misleading because of its associations with "moral behaviour or the conventions of ritual purity"; *Mary*, 109.

⁸ Gaventa, *Mary*, 110. Cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273.

self. Indeed, under the protection of the Lord, Mary's purity ensures that she can even give birth in a cave because divinity now accompanies her wherever she goes. In this way, and in accordance with Foskett who argues that Mary's characterization as pure must be understood in the context of holiness,⁹ Mary's concern for and maintenance of ritual, menstrual, sexual/moral and genealogical purity allows her not only contact, but actual affiliation with the divine. Mary's exceptional purity sets her aside for God and her body, which is not only pure, but holy, transforms into a sacred Temple suitable for the Son of God.¹⁰ Mary is best characterized as sacredly pure.

B. Understanding Mary's Potential Menstrual Impurity

Why does the author allude to the possibility that Mary is susceptible to menstrual impurity when the entire narrative is devoted to extolling her exceptional purity? In this study, I proposed and discussed four main reasons for this inclusion. First, as shown in our inquiry into the place and function of menstrual purity in the *Protevangelium of James*, the allusion to Mary's ability to menstruate serves as a literary pivot in the narrative. Secondly, it provides as a way to confirm Mary's continued observance of the laws concerning menstrual separation: by accepting her removal from the Temple precinct, Mary shows that she is indeed a good Jew who is attentive to her ritual state. Thirdly, attention brought to Mary's possible ability to menstruate signals her transition from girlhood into motherhood and her important role as the mother of the son who will provide redemption for "all the children of Israel." Finally, though Mary's extreme purity functions to set her apart as unique, the reference to her ability to (possibly) menstruate makes her role as Virgin mother accessible to other women in a meaningful way.

As such, our investigation of Mary's characterization in the *Protevangelium of James* may contribute to notions of purity in early Judaism and Christianity, as well as the early history of Mariology and the representation of women, gender, and sexuality in ancient literature. Moreover, attention to the concern for and presentation of purity in the work may help to shed light on the *Protevangelium of James*' much debated provenance and date. Although significant for the culture of early Christendom, Syrian

B. Understanding Mary's Potential Menstrual Impurity

Christianity is an area of research that has often been overlooked for its significant role in the history and development of Christianity and Mariology. The *Protevangelium of James* provides us with much information and important steps towards achieving a complete picture of Mary; our challenge now is to try to comprehend its place among other documents that deal with similar themes from the same milieu and to utilize the understudied resources from Syrian Christian traditions to enhance even further our understanding of Mary.

⁹ Additionally, Foskett writes that she "emerges as a holy child," and that "in the portrayal of Mary, purity signals nothing less than holiness"; *Virgin Conceived*, 148–49.

¹⁰ As the sacred Temple is often described as God's holy residence on earth, the image of Mary's body as a holy Temple is most fitting since it is in the womb of her body that the Son of God will dwell.

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